

CHAPTER III

RITUAL IN THEATRE

(Ritual concepts in Artaud and Grotowski)

3.0. Introduction

A search into the various phases of the revival of Western Theatre in the last few decades would expose that how theatre exponents like Artaud, Grotowski, Peter Brook and others are indebted to the ancient forms of ritual arts and theatre concepts, in conducting their universally renowned theatrical experiments. An attempt has been made here to trace the ritual concepts in Artaud and Grotowski with special emphasis on their direct or indirect obligation to ritual arts in forming the ideas of the actor, the audience as well as other external elements of theatre such as the use of space, properties, costume, music, light etc. The effort is to show the relevance in them with respect to modern Malayalam Theatre. They have their own concepts about each of them. On deeper analysis this essentially leads to various theatrical elements in ritual performing arts.

3.1.1 Actor

In theatre the first and final word is the actor. Theatre is the actor's art, nothing else. The full involvement of the actor's mind and body will only realise the ultimate purpose of theatre. The relationship between mass and space which is the basis of spectacle is the organic creation of the actor. The total actor, the stylised actor, is a disciplined actor. In every true actor



there is the intense wish to elevate himself to a metaphysical plane while acting. The divine and disciplined actor in the ancient ritual arts like Theyyam, Padayani, Mudiyettu etc. tried to transcend the barrier of mind and body to rise to a metaphysical plane during performance. In the modern theatrical experiments of Stanislavski, Mayerhold, Grotowski, Peter Brook etc., there is the effort to realize this goal towards the evolution of a total actor.

3.1.2 Theatre Language

The first object of the theatre vocabulary is the human body, the main source of sound and movement. It is through the body of the actor, the language of the theatre is created. The emotion created in the actor should be externalised through body and voice. The stylisation whether it is vocal or physical should come from the mind of the actor. The spectacle thus created by the actor is evolved through improvisations. The language of the theatre is thus created by the actor during rehearsals. This is the basic difference of the language of the theatre with other performing arts which have fixed scores as performance-language.

3.1.3 Actor Training

To create spectacular symbols on the stage, the actor needs special training. This is the first lesson that the modern theatre worker derives from ritual performing arts. In theatre-training, the basic rule is to transcend the barrier of



mind and body. This is the basis of all actor-training. This is achieved in two ways. As an experiment, an external action would be formulated. Then, this action would be internalised. Secondly, the actor may try to find out an external action through his internal impulses and try to relate them with other external actions. In both of them, the effort is to transcend the barrier of mind and body. Richard Schechner gives the aims of actor-training as follows, (1985: 213 - 60). Performers are trained, first of all, to interpret the dramatic text. Then the training is to transmit the performance-text. The third function of training is the preservation of secret knowledge which belongs to specific family or groups as in ritual arts. This secret knowledge gives performance a power. Achievement of self expression is the fourth function of training. It helps the performer to get the inside out. This sort of training is seen in Grotowski's and Stanislavski's system of actor-training. The fifth function of training is to give the actor the ability of group formation during performance. This includes action and reaction with respect to other performers.

3.2.0 The ritual concept of the Actor in Artaud

The analysis of the concept of the actor in Artaud discloses the ritual basis of his theory. It is nothing but the concept of the actor in ritual arts. He draws clear parallels with the performer in ritual arts and the actor in his theatre when he speaks about the action of theatre as a



plague like delirium, taking extreme gestures (1938 : 30). With his performance of the actor is a sort of magic which digs out the darkness of the psyche with supernatural powers as in a trance as that of a 'Velichappadu'. He further elaborates his concept of the actor, that if the actor wants to make use of his emotion he has to see the human beings as a double like a perpetual spectre. "A true actor should ape this spectre and on this spectre, he should impose the forms and images of his own sensibility. ... This soul-spectre can be regarded as intoxicated with its own screams, something like the Hindu Mantras, those consonances, those mysterious ancestors." (1938 : 134) This is what the actor in the ritual arts is doing while in performance (Ch. 4).

3.2.1. Theatre-language in Artaud : Ritual relevance

Artaud's primary interest lay in discovering a theatrical-language which should first of all appeal to the senses. Such a language should be metaphysical with relevance to magic and sorcery. This is a type of language which can affect the whole organism of the individual, like a renewed exorcism. The language of words should be replaced by the language of signs. This must have the most immediate impact upon us. For creating such a language he arrives at a series of suggestions about the magic of respiration. Here the Oriental Theatre where there is no spoken language, but only a language of gestures, attitudes and signs, influenced him. This is the quality of the



ritual language referred to earlier in the second chapter. This language should create images which should be enlarged to the status of gods, heroes or gods in the mythical dimension. These images should provide not only the external pleasure to the eye, or ear but also to the spirit. Artaud derived his inspiration of creating such a language from the religious and magic theatre of the Balinese. It is a theatre which is based on age old traditions, which preserved the secrets of using gestures, intonations and harmonies in relation to the senses. He calls it the most beautiful manifestation of pure theatre. Here "the sense of a new physical language, based upon signs and no longer upon word is liberated. These actors with their geometric robes seemed to be animated hieroglyphs." (1938 : 54) (N-12). He instructs that the lessons of the ritual- theatre of Balinese for the Western Theatre lies in realising "the extreme poetic and dramatic consequences of all the elements of 'mise en scene' in time, space and movement." (1938 : 54). Thus Artaud had in him the idea of a ritual language for his theatre. (N-13).

3.2.2 Actor-Training

The principles by which an actor is prepared in Artaud's theatre bear the influence of ritual arts. He speaks about the formation of an actor, the actor and an athlete. It is his breath that supports the body of an actor. But it is the body that support the breath of an athlete. For every mental action, every lap of human



emotion, there is a corresponding breath which is appropriate to it. The actor should be able to distinguish it. This principle is inherent in the breathing exercises of Koodiyattom. Artaud believed in Shaman-like powers of the actor who could tap his own passion. Jaquiline Martin tells how Artaud brought out the inner self of an actor. (1991:61) (N-14).

In the preparation of the actor in his theatre Artaud was very much influenced by the Eastern cult of ritual theatre. David Bradby points out that Artaud formulated his acting techniques based on Chinese accupuncture points and on breathing methods from the Jewish cabala (1987: 44-46) (N-15). There is vital connection between emotion and breathing. All breathing has three measures, "male," "female" and "androgynous" (i.e. "expanding," "attracting" and "the balanced.") In acting terms, the aim was to re-discover the breathing associated with every mental movement, every feeling so that we can have access to the origin of emotion and thus convey it. The result will be that the audience will be looked into the breathing rhythms. As a result of this, the physical and spiritual tempi of the actor will merge, and he will move towards a magical trance. This is in the essence of divine theatre.

3.2.3 Trance in the actor, a ritual element

While in performance, the ritual actor moves towards



a trance. Artaudean actor also experiences this trance. In trance, the actor is in a state in which he is completely taken over, body and soul, by a powerful spiritual force, beyond everyday existence. Grotowski points out that trance is the ability of the actor to concentrate in a particular theatrical way (1968 : 37). This ability can be attained with a minimum of good will. A person in trance is highly aware of his surroundings. During this time, the person is deeply involved with what he is doing and at the same time he is capable of sensing and incorporating the events in his environment without being affected by them. A powerful actor would pass on to such a state. This deeply affects the spectators. The trance happening in a ritual performer and that in the actor in a theatre is comparable, though with different degrees.

3.2.4 Transformation and transportation

The transformative process occurring in the actor in Artaud's theatre of cruelty is a comparable to that happens in a ritual performer. While in action he goes to the extremity of instinct and plunges even to the root of his being. But he has to keep away from accomplishing the act. Therefore, to keep from committing a crime the actor needs tremendous power than even a murderer who needs courage to complete his act. Thus his transformation occurs only to a certain limit in the theatre. The



transformational-level occurring in a ritual performer and in an actor though varying, is similar to some extent. But the transportation in the actor in the theatre happens more quickly than in the performer in a ritual art.

3.2.5 Action in The Cenci, an analysis

The techniques of the Balinese dances from which Artaud drew his inspiration for his theatre have not much influence in his own theatrical creations, his scenarios, and the text of his play The Cenci. But it is a perfect example of his theatre of cruelty. He has told us that his heroes dwell in the realm of cruelty and they must be judged outside good and evil (1938 : 129). They are incestuos, sacrilageous, adulterous, rebels, insurgents and blasphemous. Christopher Innes gives us a detailed picture of the production of The Cenci (1981 : 67-68). In the play Count Cenci is the personification of absolute evil. In the orgiastic banquet scene he celebrates the ruin of his sons, by symbolically drinking their blood. He rapes his daughter Beatrice who wants to take revenge upon him, but is arrested, tortured and executed. These violent crimes of incest and patricide by Cenci are portrayed with a deliberate effort to infringe the deepest taboos and natural social relationship of man. How the concept of the theatre of cruelty is realised, is given by J.I. Styan (1990 : 110). Balletic patterns of movement by group of actors were adopted, with a mystical significance by which the



audience were drawn into a magic circle. Even the object on which Beatrice is tortured is a wheel. For creating an unnatural atmosphere he applied slow motion. A bizarre nature was brought to the action sequences by introducing dummies to mingle with live actors on the stage. The expressionistic way of acting was also introduced by the application of huge masks, stylised facial expressions and intense and frenzied gestures of the hands. To add more to the grotesqueness, the arrangement of electronic notes, the reduction of words to sounds, mechanical amplification, the use of spot light to pickout symbolic effects etc. were used.

3.2.6 Action-sequences in The Spurt of Blood.

The action-sequences in The Spurt of Blood have a hallucinatory shock effects of a surrealistic film. All characters here are symbolic of varieties of spiritualised love. The actions revolve round many bizarre sequences such as the visible alteration in character's physical shapes, the introduction of the cascade of objects, bodies and even abstractions. There would be swift transitions and variations in speed "from frantic acceleration to vomit-inducing slowness" Innes (1981 : 91). He pictures human limbs and pieces of masonry falling from the skies to represent the collapse civilization. A whore biting at the wrist of God symbolised the rebellion of mankind. This was followed by a great spurt of blood shooting across the



stage. This was almost the realization of Artaud's theatre of cruelty.

3.3.0 Audience in Artaud

Artaud believed in the function of theatre to unite his audience in the ritual of common affirmation. For shaping his ideas, he sought a new communion, a new sign-system and a new priesthood in the theatre. This communion element in Artaud's theatre was at the core of his belief. His theatre of cruelty is comparable to a ritual theatre when he asserts that the spectator should be at the centre, the spectacle surrounding him. The audience were to be encircled so that direct contact could be made. The theatre building should be, similar architecturally, to "a holy place". The audience would be seated in the centre of action in swivel chairs. They would change their focus according to the movements of the drama around the hall. As in ritual theatre the experience of the audience should be immediate and primal.

This actor - audience - space relationship is the concept in any ritual arts like Padayani, Theyyam or 'Mudiyettu'. Artaud equates the scene of space with the God's like holes of shadows. In his first Manifesto for a theatre of cruelty he wrote that plays should be presented in a large bare hanger or barn, the action going on around the spectator in the four corners of the building. The



actors would move from one point to another in the hall. The idea is to involve the audience physically and mentally into the performance. This ritualisation of theatre with the aim of involving the spectator totally in the stage action has become an ideal for the Western-drama.

3.3.1 Treatment of myth and audience participation

In the essay "The Theatre and the Plague" (1938 : 15) Artaud airs his view on the role of myth in Theatre. Building up of myth in theatre would call for the audience— participation because then the audience would share the archetypal psyche with the actor. Myths should be created, "to express life in its immense universal aspect, and from that life to extract images in which we find pleasure in discovering ourselves." (1938 : 116) But we must not use myths from old traditions of Greece or Rome because these myths have become exhausted and tame we have to create new myths to interpret human life. Thus he saw myth as the dynamic centre of the theatre performance. He also saw that the recreation of myth renewed its essential values with current significance.

3.3.2 Catharsis in Artaud, its ritual significance

The effect of Artaud's theatre on the audience would be like that of a plague. With Artaud the beauty of the plague is in its destruction of destructive social forms. Like the plague, the theatre has the capacity to upset,



"important collectivities" to create a social disaster" to turn an occasion into a conflagration." (1938 : 116). Through an experience of his theatre, the audience would know all perverse possibilities of the mind of an individual or people. This invokes in them a sense of anarchy and danger. Here the theatre acts on the audience like a catharsis. It should serve as a harmless outlet for repressions. With him the theatre can ventilate those feelings which are usually expressed in more destructive ways. The violent action on the stage should be beneficial for the audience to solve the problems outside the theatre, by revealing the lie, the slackness, baseness and hypocrisy of the world. The bloody impulses of the audience would be purged by this. In other words, it is like an exorcism of fantasies. In exteriorising the desire of the spectators for crime, there occurs a catharsis in them, draining off their violent feelings. This is experienced by the audience participating in Theyyam or Mudiyettu. This process is analysed in the next chapter. As in ritual performing arts, through this theatre, Artaud tried on the audience true magic and the hypnotically suggestive mood. The performance was not aimed to entice just the minds or senses of the audience, but their entire existence. Artaud likens the experience he sought, to that of a charmed snake, "I propose to treat the spectators like the snake charmer's subjects and conduct them by means of their organisms to an apprehension of the subtlest notions." (1938 : 81). Often, the performer in ritual performing arts like Theyyam or Mudiyettu does this function on the audience.



3.4.0 The ritual relevance of the theatre externals in Artaud.

Almost all ritual arts are highly sensuous in costume design, use of properties and also in 'thauryathrika' (Geetha, Nrithya and Vadya). He uses all possible means of expression such as music, dance, plastic art, pantomime, mimicry, gesticulation intonation, architecture etc. He pleads for re-discovering the religious and mystic preference in theatre. In the ritual arts of Kerala the essential approach to performance is what Artaud regards as important. It was the ritual theatre of the Balinese that influenced Artaud in this respect. Inspired by this he writes, "Every spectacle will contain a physical and objective element, perceptible to all, cries, groans, surprises, theatricalities of all kinds, magic beauty of costumes taken from certain ritual models, resplendent lighting, incantational beauty of voices." (1938 : 93).

3.4.1 Costume in Artaud's theatre

Artaud was highly impressed by the hieroglyphic quality of the costumes of Balinese dancers. He is against using the modern dress and pleaded for using age-old costumes of ritual intent, because they "preserve a beauty and reverential appearance from their closeness to the tradition that gave them birth." (1938 : 64) It was the costume of the Balinese dancers that inspired Artaud. Their costumes are most animated and highly coloured. This gave each actor "a double body and a double set of limbs" and



exercised much influence on Artaud to form his concept of "the double" and of pure theatre. (N-16)

3.4.2 Stage-props and sets

As in ritual arts, Artaud pleaded for using highly visual stage-props. Manikins, enormous masks, objects of strange proportion etc. should be used on the stage. They will appear on the stage with the same effect of verbal images. They have the power to enforce the concrete aspect of every image and every expression. In the poor theatre of Grotowski, the use of costume by the actors is minimum, but in the theatre of cruelty costume is given primary importance as part and parcel of spectacle. He rejects, as in ritual arts, the use of all sets. The function of the set would be carried out by hieroglyphic characters, ritual, costume etc.

3.4.3 Musical Instruments : Music and Sound

In Artaud's theatre musical instruments are treated as objects and as part of the set. Their sound should have the qualities and vibration of absolutely new instruments. So there should be the effort to revive ancient and forgotten instruments or to invent new ones. New musical instruments should be discovered with new alloys of metals which should be able to produce unbearably piercing sounds of music. The language used in Artaud's theatre was designed



to shock. It is done through the use of unconventional words, not by its inherent semantic qualities. Voices and sounds are to be used in theatre, in Artaudian conception, like that in the Balinese dances. There, the stress is on spectacle over spoken words. "It is not a question of suppression of the articulated word, but of giving to words approximately the importance they have in dreams." (Sellin, Eric. 1968 : 11) This language will work hypnotically on the senses, using spectacle and sensation, with its actors performing like giant effigies in huge masks. A ritualism induced by this can be shared by the crowd. As in ritual arts the words here used will make special use of their sounds, their intonations and incantations to go with the new music and new instrument.

Robert Brustein points out that the language in the theatre of Artaud is not used for communicating social or psychological concepts, but it is used for its emotional colouring and incantatory tone. (1978:372) This is what usually the language in a ritual performance does. (Analysed in II Chapter). Artaud writes, "To make metaphysics out of a spoken language is to make the language express what it does not ordinarily express; to make use of it in a new, exceptional and unaccustomed fashion." (1938 : 373). Thus Artaud's idea of theatre is primarily visual.



3.4.4 Light as visual symbol

In the theatre of Artaud light is used to evoke delirious emotions. Like the musical instruments, it is used as visual objects. According to him the lighting equipment prevalent in theatre was no longer adequate. The particular action of light upon the mind, the effects of all kinds of luminous vibrations must be investigated. Instead of the decorative function, light should have the quality of an actual language on the stage. It must recover even an element of thinness, density and opaqueness with a view to even producing the sensations of heat, cold, anger, fear etc. Christopher Innes comments on his inventive use of lighting. (1981 : 93) His use of black in Burnt Breast, and the pulsating illumination of the Mysteries of Love or the lights required for The Spurt of Blood were all revolutionary for the time. Light was used with the purpose of disorienting the spectator or to give emotional colouring to the scene. In his view the true value of lighting was its ability to dematerialise stage action, transposing it into a primitive, subconscious key.

3.5 Analysis,

The elements of ritual theatre is directly traceable to Artaud, although he did not call his own theatre, a theatre of ritual. What actually his theatre tells is to go to the experience behind the ritual, to be primitive men



and women. For this he does not use the word "ritual" but magic. His theatre analysis reveals the fact that he is aiming fundamentally for a religious experience. His ideas echo many of the ritual art forms, especially the Balinese ritual dance-form and also the ritual theatre of Kerala like Theyyam, Mudiyettu, Padayani etc. The masks, the mask like make-up and costumes of Hindu Gods, or Goddesses and demon-beings in Theyyam, Padayani, Mudiyettu, Koodiyattom and Kathakali conjure up the mysterious shadowed and irrational forms referred by him. In the Balinese theatre Artaud saw two things present. A theatre not dominated by dialogue was his dream. His theatre is dominated by the physical language of sign, gestures and mimic actions which defy logical expressions. Such a language would contain a force inaccessible to thought but only feeling. Secondly, in his theatre, a shift of focus from human psyche to the cosmic forces in the universe is seen. This world-view expressed in his theatre is found in the indigenous theatre of Kerala, in Theyyam, Mudiyettu, Padayani, Koodiyattom, Kathakali etc.

Thus in the modern attempt to re-discover the primitive ritual function of theatre, Artaud becomes the guide. It must be pointed out here that apart from staging a few plays, Artaud left no practical application of his theories. His theatre remained only as an idea. The soul of ritual arts is spontaneity and discipline. "Artaud touches something essential in theatre. It is the true



lesson of the sacred theatre whether we speak of the Medieval European drama, the Balinese or the Indian Kathakali, that spontaneity and discipline far from wakening each other, mutually re-inforce themselves." (Grotowski, 1968 : 88) The ritual basis of Artaud's theatre is traced by Grotowski in the two expressions i.e. "cruelty is rigour" and to express the foundation of the actor's art as "Actors should be like martyrs burnt alive, still signalling to us from their stakes." (1984:93) In all ritual performing arts of Kerala, what is demanded from the actor is this sacrificial spirit.

3.6.0 Actor-Concept in Grotowski : ritual influence

The first and last word in the theatre of Grotowski is 'the actor.' Throughout his experiments in theatre, he placed the actor at the centre. "The personal and scenic technique of the actor is the core of the theatre art..." (1984;15) He wanted to avoid all other externals of Theatre such as make-up, costume, scenography, separate performance-area, lighting and sound effects and concentrate on the actor's body and craft which, he believed, can render consummate theatrical performances. This acceptance of poverty as the true theatre with the actor at its centre, "revealed to us not only the backbone of the medium, but also the deep riches which lie in the very nature of the art-form." (1984 : 21) He bases his actor-concept on a ritual principle. "The performer with a capital letter is a man



of action. He is not a man who plays another. He is a dancer, a priest, a warrior he is outside aesthetic genres. Ritual is performance, an accomplished action, an act. Degenerated ritual is a spectacle." (1984 : 36) The actor should be able to make his body an obedient instrument for performing a spiritual act, which is holy. This holiness of the actor induce the spectator to undergo an experience of such a holiness. In such a state, the impulses the actor expresses waver on the border line between dream and reality.

3.6.1 The difference in the concept of the actor in Grotowski with Artaud

In both Artaud and Grotowski the concept of the actor is essentially based on ritual theatre. The "total act" envisaged by both leads us to the root of the concept of the ritual performer. (Ch. 4) Spontaneity and discipline which form the core of a ritual performance are what Artaud and Grotowski strove for. In Grotowski's theatre an actor should elevate himself to the state of total act, to a moment of holiness and translumination in which his body disappears. In such state the spectator is able to see only a series of visible impulses. It is a total act in which there occurs a mortification of the flesh and illumination of the spirit in the actor as well as in the audience. In such a state both of them experience a profound sense of



community. In the theatre of Artaud also this identification happens. This is a ritual concept.

3.6.2 Action as sacrifice and autopenetration, a ritual quality.

Grotowski called for "a total act" on the part of the actor. Artaud's idea that an actor should be like martyrs burnt alive still signalling through flames, is recalled here.

"The only ritual which can be repeated in theatre without blasphemy is the ritual of sacrifice in which the actor is simultaneously the executioner and the martyr." (1968:49)

It was in this sacrificial element in the actor demanded by Grotowski, that his research unconsciously re-discovered ritual. He also believed that the actor's gift to the spectator. Here the actor-audience relationship is that of a priest in a sacrificial ritual and a worshipper. The priest performs the ritual for himself and on behalf of others. Thus the performance of the actor becomes almost like a ceremony. Peter Brook's comment in this regard is pertinent. "This theatre is holy, because its purpose is holy; it has clearly defined place in the community and responds to a need the churches can no longer fill."

[1986(1968):67]



In the final two production of The Constant Prince and Apocalypsis cum Figuris. Grotowski tried to explore both the inner and outer aspects of the sacrificial theme. In The Constant Prince the acting of Ryszard Cieslak in the title role realized Grotowski's idea of actor being penetrated, having transcended the state of his inner dichotomy. His acrobatic, vocal and physical technique was the realisation of Grotowski, body-language. There he embodied the spirit of Christ who suffered at the hands of his persecutors. Like Christ he passively accepts the role of a martyr and offers love and kindness in response to brutality. The total act of Cieslak may be seen as an act of ritual redemption for theatre. Here in the actor's self-transcendence, the myth of the sanctity of the martyrdom is reincarnated. In Apocalypsis cum Figuris, sacrifice is taken to a level of personal response and responsibility. This sense of "total act" giving oneself or surrender is the basis of all actors in ritual theatre.

3.6.3 The acting-score or theatre-language in Grotowski: A Comparison with ritual arts.

Throughout his theatre-experiments in his Thirteen Rows Theatre, Grotowski was trying for a newer and newer theatre-language. He rejected the belief of Artaud that the signs system from oriental theatre can be transferred to European theatre. The ritual theatre of the East had universal alphabets which are fixed and imitated by the



performer. But the theatre-language of Grotowski is ever-changing. The score here is evolved through rehearsals. He emphasised the fixation of 'acting scores' only during rehearsals. This is similar to Stanislavski's prepared line of action. It is after fixing the scores, which is otherwise called discipline, the search for spontaneity should begin. During rehearsal, the actor's physical action becomes a sign. This is recorded not in writing, but in body. A 'sign' is an outward response to a pure impulse. The finished performance is composed of such signs. During rehearsals Grotowski fixed these sign-system. Thus his theatre becomes a theatre of signs.

"It is a semiotic theatre in which texts, objects, actors are infinitely re-deployable, words are re-lexicalised, texts are intercut and their intertextuality made evident. Like in the Ritual theatre, the actors search was for the archetypal physical sign of the actor's condition." (Frost and Yarrow, 1990: 81). In the production of Sakuntala (1960), "We can see an attempt to explore the possibility of creating signs in the European Theatre in order to find the sources of ritual play such as existed in the Peking Opera and Oriental Theatre." (Jaqueline, 1991:70)

In ritual arts, the signs are already fixed, in theatre they are evolved during performance and then fixed; while both are disciplined, both have the elements of spontaneity in them.



3.6.4 The Preparation of the actor in Grotowski: ritual influence.

The ritual concept of performance is that the art of acting needs constant schooling. The training methods of the actor in Grotowski was fundamentally based on Eastern theatres of Peking Opera, Indian Kathakali and Japanese Noh. As in the ritual performer Grotowski tried to eradicate the blocks in the actor in his Theatre Laboratory experiments. His aim was that the actor should rise to an elevated spiritual or holy state. He recognized that the problem of mystic roots of the elementary human situation has definite meaning.

Generally, the process of training in classical oriental theatre consists of three parts (i) Memorising and mastering of hundreds of gestural and corporal and vocal signs (ii) Acquiring of basic skills so that these signs may be accomplished without resistance (iii) Finally the stage in which the body is liberated through acrobatic work from natural inhibitions of space and gravity. Grotowski's idea of actor training (i) Exercises plastiques (2) Corporels (3) Vocal and respiratory work are based on the Eastern concept. A detailed investigation into the various forms of these, would reveal the fact that they have tremendous impact from the ritual arts of the East. The exercise plastiques generally include fast rotations like back and forth of the joints, head, shoulders, elbows



wrists, hands, figures, chest, lips, torso etc. Exercises of joints going in opposite or contradictory directions, the head going in one way, the shoulders another. The exercises given to the performers in Koodiyattom, Kathakali, Padayani etc. are similar to this (Interviews). The exercise corporel consists in a series of acrobatic like head-stands, hand-stands, shoulder-stands and high jumps etc. are adopted from Kalarippayattu. The "Cat", the basic corporel exercise is designed primarily for energy and suppleness of the vertebrae. This is almost similar to the posture "pulichadakkam" in Kalaripayattu. Vocal and respiratory work are given to discover and remove the blockages in the actor and to discover the natural voices and the natural respiration.

The actor's respiratory and vocal apparatus must be infinitely more developed so as to be able to produce quick reflexes. The actor should know how to direct the air to those parts of the body where sound can be created as a sort of resonator. The number of resonator in the body of the actor is unlimited like head, chest, back of the heads, his nose, teeth, larynx, belly, spine etc. Different kinds of respiration is needed at various stages of his performance. The actor should be able to use these resonators unconsciously during performance. The plasticity of the body, gesticulation, the ability to construct masks by means of facial muscles etc. are achieved through these exercises. The consummation of



these exercises is that, they make the actor able to identify certain areas of the body which are his source of energy. The investigation revealed that some of the sources of energy in the actors body are in the lumbar region, the abdomen and the area around the solar plexus.

(N.17) In Koodiyattom and Kathakali almost similar system of training is given to the performers.

3.6.5 Actor in Grotowski, ritual influence of the East

Grotowski was highly impressed by the morality of the oriental actor, that he acquires through the traditional ways of training system. But the European actor's training method was only intended at acquiring skill but in the orient it was "a means to go for one's self, to meet life, infact it is life, a way of existence." (Kumiega, Jennifer, 1987:110-198). To the performer of Theyyam, Padayani or Mudiyettu, the ritual art is a way of existence. (Interviews). This moral essence of the performer in the oriental arts impressed Grotowski and he tried to infuse this culture in his actor of the Laboratory Theatre. He found that by this the actor can be removed from daily life and would be inspired by utmost sincerity and devotion.

The other factor that influenced Grotowski of the Eastern theatre - culture was the discipline and the spontaneity of the actor there. He discovered that



discipline and spontaneity far from weakening each other, mutually re-inforce them. He realised that in the theatre of the West, this had not been there. Also the equation of personal or individual truth with the universal truth is not found there. This is the erosion of value-system and belief. This morality of the actor of the East inspired him to evolve the holy actor-concept. In his effort to discover what is most basic and emphatic in an actor, he wanted to create a paradigm of human kind. When all the inessentials in an actor are stripped off, the actor would evolve into a spiritual substance common to all. This is what makes the actor universally communicable. In the formation of this idea, the morality concept of purification of the actor, Grotowski owes much to the Oriental Theatre.

Through the experiments on the actor Grotowski aimed at an organic response rooted in his body. He could realise that this response came from an organic source-point of the creative impulse. This he called the organic base point of bodily reaction. He located this at the base of the vertibral column including the lower pelvic area of the abdomen. The inevitable connection with the Eastern concept of "Kundalini Yoga" is here. This is the life-energy represented as a serpent coiled three and a half-times that is dormant at the base of the spine. The seeking of the life-energy by Grotowski in his theatre is a very deep ritual concept.



3.6.6 Grotowski and Balinese theatre

We have seen how the ritual process in the Balinese dance fired the imagination of Artaud. In an article Iwayen Lendra draws three parallels between Grotowski's and ritual theatre of the Balinese. (1991:113-128) (i) Balinese people have an intimate relationship with nature, Grotowski also loved to work in a natural setting (ii) Religious rituals and customs are essential elements of the Balinese, that are very close to the traditional discipline and teaching methods. (iii) For the Balinese, art was a medium of true inner expression, connecting gods to their worshippers and the aim of art in Grotowski was to generate higher awareness. In the exercises given to the actors also there are parallels. The writer draws a comparison of motion exercise in the two. In the Bali, this motion exercises have a purpose of awakening the innate physical power. This is the sleeping energy or 'Kundalini'. Through investigation Grotowski wanted to wake up this energy - centre. In this awakened state awareness, sensitivity and perception can be increased. This is an essential factor in a ritual performer.

3.6.7 Body-memory: a ritual concept

When interviewed, all the performers of the ritual arts disclosed that there was no deliberate effort on their part for performance. The performance - sequences are



already embedded in every part of their body or in the whole body like a memory. Grotowski's exercises are directed to achieve what he calls body-memory. According to him we do not possess body-memory, our entire body is memory. It is by means of body-memory that the impulses are released. "Memories are always physical reaction. . . . It was the automatic body-response to a situation which constituted the emotion itself rather than the mental perception of the experienced emotions." (Kumiega, 1987 : 120) He points out that the performer's body and essence is transformed through a very difficult process, into the body of essence. In this respect, the body itself should function like a brain. It is this element or ritual process that is working in the psyche of the ritual performer.

3.6.8 Transformation and transportation in Grotowski's actor: Ritual comparison

The transformation in the ritual actor while in action depends on the ritual atmosphere charged with belief, devotion and also the level of "thauryathrika" element in the performance. Grotowski's exercises were directed to create this element of 'flow' in the actor. He assumed that in the actor there existed something in the nature of a natural, organic flow of impulse towards sound and expression. This 'flow' is creative, that forms the material for artistic creation. The basis of his exercise



was to eradicate the blockages in the actor and free the impulses to create 'a flow' in him. The surrender to the flow of action is the ritual-process. It is here the transformation occurs. Schechner quotes Csikszentmihalyi to refer to this experience of flow. It is "the merging of action and awareness. A person in flow has no dualistic perspective he is aware of his actions but not of the awareness itself." (1990:124) How this transformation works in Ryszard Cieslak is narrated by him to Schechner. In spite of the score of acting, at the moment of action all the preparation falls away, everything becomes different because he becomes different. This is similar to a ritual performer. (N-18) Cieslak knows how to prepare and be ready to flow with his role, but had little idea about how he is transported and returned to his starting point. For 'cooling down' he often drinks Vodka, talks, smokes, for him getting out of the role is something harder than getting into it. This is what happens to a performer in ritual arts. In Bali for example, there are rituals for cooling down, including sprinkling with holy water, inhalation of incense, massage and even sacrifices of animals and blood sprinkling. (Schechner:1983:97)

3.7.0 Audience-concept in Grotowski: ritual influence

In ritual arts it is seen that, they primarily function as a medium of communion between the actors and the audience. The greatest contribution of Grotowski to the world Theatre is this communion - element. This



"Communion" or greater intimacy between audience and actor is one of the greatest dynamics in the evolution of 20th C. Theatre. Grotowski wanted the life-enhancing experience of the theatre to be extended towards the spectator in a shared experience with the actor. His experiments in theatre was a continuous exploration in search of this possibility. As in the ritual arts, he wanted to eliminate the dichotomy between the actor and the audience. By creating ritual in theatre he believed that he could achieve his aim. "I was of the opinion that as it was infact rites that brought theatre into being, so through a return to ritual . . . should enable the restoration of that primitive, ritualistic unity. . . between the actor and spectator." (1987:129) His early work was directed towards achieving an authentic experience of ritual within contemporary theatre. With this aim he manipulated the physical and psychological actor - spectator relationship. Much of his experiments lay in bringing together actor and the spectator face to face to observe their reaction in ordinary language or theatrical language. Thus the participation of the spectator was evinced. His experiments were directed towards whether in such theatrical circumstances ritual with its unifying qualities would take place, or not and thus ensure a co-operation of the actor and the spectator. (N-19). A co-operation or participation of the actor was his aim. But in earlier experiments he discovered that such a relationship is impossible "in an age when neither a communal faith exists,



nor any liturgy rooted in the collective psyche as an axis for ritual." (Kumiega 1987:132)

3.7.1 Catharsis in Grotowski: a social psychotherapy

Grotowski often referred to his theatre process as a therapy for the actors and spectators. In his theatre, for the actor, the character is a means to grapple with his own self. The character is "the tool to reach secret layers of his personality and strip himself off what hurts most and lies deepest in his secret heart." (Eugenio Barba, 1969: 173) It is the merciless process of self discovery without which there can be no artistic creation, no communication, the actor deliberately breaks the shell of his social identity. On the part of the actor this is sacrifice and renunciation. Both the actor and the spectator accept this element of sacrifice. In such a state the element of alienation between them falls away and ^{they} reach a climax, a summit of purification. This is the way in which psychotherapy works in Grotowski.

3.7.2 The ritual element of actor - audience Communion:

Experiments.

Grotowski investigated this spectator - actor relationship through social psycho-therapy in his productions Akropolis (1962) and Dr. Faustus (1963). David



Bradby and David Williams give a description of how this was done. (1979:117-120). The actors represented the dead. The spectators were seated in isolated groups on raised daises in and around the central space. They had to watch with fascinated horror the brutalised actor prisoner's re-enactment of various myths, The Trojan War, Jacob and the Angel, the Resurrection. This was an attempt to re-assert values to find some meaniⁿgs in these myths. In Dr. Faustus the spectators were seated at the table, proximity to the action, Faustus presiding their head. Within a wooden wall like structure, the space was compressed. Complementary to the physical images before the spectators, vocal score was delivered vibrantly from behind the screen, surrounded by the spectators who were undergoing a psychotherapeutic experience.

As a further attempt to forge a meaningful link between actor and spectator he experimented with what he called "the unities of place, time and action." In Kordian he transferred the action of the play to a mental hospital, in which the actors portrayed doctors and patients, with some spectators also being designated as inmates. The hallucinative experience of the main character as taking place in the present time was witnessed by the spectators. The action of the production took place at the same time as that of the performance. The Theatre was literally where it happened. This was an effort to convert the audience into participants as in ritual arts. (N-19).



3.7.3 New concept of the Spectator

In his relentless experiments to effect an actor-audience communion, a new aesthetic was evolved by 1965. This was through the realisation of a 'total act' by the actor. It was in The Constant Prince he tried to evolve this through the act of Ceislak, as explained earlier. Here the spectators were removed from the bare playing space. Their psyche was attacked by placing them behind the four high walls of a wooden box. This spatial distancing of the spectator made him to assume the role of the witness-observer. Here the spectator was able to see how performance can be a means of personal expiation. The experiment was further conducted in Apocalypsis cum Figuris.

3.7.4 Paratheatrical experiments: and actor: Ritual elements

From 1970 onwards the audience-concept in Grotowski underwent a spiritual dimension as in ritual arts. It was called para-theatrical work. The concept of the audience here is not as observers but as direct participants. Here he wanted "a particular kind of spectator, who had genuine spiritual needs to analyse himself through confrontation with the performance, to analyse himself. . . towards a search for the truth about himself and his mission in life." (Kumiega: 1987:170) His experiments focussed on how to involve the members of the public directly in this process. His group tried to rennovate a number of old farm



buildings in a rural environment. It created a new relationship between the group and natural world and between individual members. As in primitive life, it was an effort to elicit a natural human rhythm, an animal rhythm of working, resting and sleeping. Here the boundaries between the performers and spectators were broken down, as the activities occurred in natural surroundings, woods, fields and mountains, which led the participants to a sort of primitive ritual life. This paratheatricals directly led the later works of the Laboratorium to a new ritual-concept in theatre which he calls "The Theatre of Sources." Osinski writes "in essence this meant a multicultural exploration of ritual, communal root of the theatrical experience, and an attempt to study their foundation-techniques or sources." (1991:29) (N-20). He searched into the non-western ceremonies, liturgies and ritual forms which were a return to the original, shamanistic experience or inner transformation. Thus he ended with, as common to both the Ritual Arts and Theatre of productions, "a total act," "the utter act" and "total man."

3.7.5 Treatment of myth in Grotowski: a means of Audience-participation as in ritual arts.

Grotowski had clear ideas about the use of myths and their function in theatre. He acknowledges that myth had an independent existence in the psychology of social groups, inspiring group behaviour and tendencies. When



theatre was part of religion, myth could liberate the spiritual energy of the congregation or tribe. The function of myth then was, "the spectator had a renewed awareness of his personal truth in the truth of the myth and through fright and sense of the sacred he came to catharsis." (Bradby, 1979:118) But today the effect of myth on the audience has changed. As belief is a matter of intellectual conviction today, group identification with myth is virtually impossible. Therefore, we have to treat myth in a different way i.e. to reincarnate it to understand the reality of our problems. His aim was not to perpetuate myth in his theatre, but to confront it. Through a total commitment to the myth's human sources, he wanted to discover what it can mean to individual living at a later period of history. There is a common ground to be shared emotionally by the actor and the audience. They are inherited through one's blood, religion, culture and climate. Such myths as related to religious faiths and culture, biological myths, birth and death and other national myths in the collective consciousness of the society, are shared by the members of the community.

It is seen that with Artaud, myth was the centre of theatre-performance. He believed that the transgression of myth renewed its essential values. But according to Grotowski, this is impossible because faiths are diversified today. The community of theatre i.e. the actor and the audience cannot possibly identify itself with myth



because there is no single faith. Artaud dreamed to produce new myths through the theatre. But with Grotowski, theatre cannot produce myth, it is the subsequent generation to create it. However, in the function of myth in theatre that it would help for a communion of the actor and the audience, both share the same view. This is what we see in ritual arts.

3.8.0 Theatre - externals: Sensuous elements in Grotowski Costume, Music, Stage Props.

It has already been analysed that only the "Personal and scenic technique of the actor" as the core of Grotowskian theatre. His poor theatre concept was its consummation. Through a series of experiments, he found out that theatre can exist without make up, costume, a separate performance area, lighting or sound effects. He got rid of all types of make up. With him the actor should transform type to type, character to character, silhouette to silhouette. The actor creates different facial masks according to his inner impulses. Stage-props are avoided in the Theatre Laboratory. There will not be any introduction of anything which is not there at the beginning. The people and objects at the beginning should handle any situation throughout the play. There will not be practically any sets, only objects indispensable to dramatic action. (Grotowski, 1975:67). Here varied use of



light is forsaken. This opened up a wide range of possibilities for the actor's use of stationary light sources by deliberate work with shadows, bright spots etc. And, the actor becomes a source of "spiritual light" himself. Practical elimination of music made the performance itself music. But he did not completely avoid music or lighting or make up. They were subdued to the background, retaining a thin thread, to reinforce the performance. For e.g. in Akropolis (1962) "Stark and anonymous costumes, deeply shadowed expressionist lighting, the actor's disciplined corporeal means, this production epitomised Grotowski's central concept of a poor theatre." (Bradby, 1979:118)

3.9.0 Analysis

It is in the holy actor-concept that Grotowski comes close to the ritual arts of Kerala. For a ritual performer of Kerala-theatre, the stress given by Grotowski on actor-preparation is no wonder. In the actor-preparation of Koodiyattom or Kathakali, the concept is already there. In fact Grotowski acknowledged his indebtedness to Kathakali in this respect. His training methods specially incorporate techniques in breathing and theories of human anatomy from Indian Yoga. In the theatre of Grotowski, the actor in his 'holiness' tries for a journey towards the metaphysics. This lesson of the actor is already in the ritual arts of Kerala. The text of the play is treated by him only to show this holiness of the actor. His



Philosophy was that the text is not an end itself, it is only a means of the actor to explore himself. His actor Cieslak could embody this actor-concept in Grotowski. He could rise to a metaphysical plane while in performance. often, especially in The Constant Prince. The actor in the ritual arts is always trying to reach such a level. In this respect the actor in Grotowski is similar to the performer in ritual arts. In Theyyam or Mudiyettu, the performer sacrifices himself body and soul in his performance. This sacrificing element is seen both in a ritual performer and the actor in Grotowski.

In ritual arts, it is seen that both the 'actor' and the audience become one and do a journey towards a metaphysical plane. This is a ritual act without any element of logic in it. In Grotowskian theatre, especially in his paratheatrical experiments this element is seen. The performer in ritual arts prepares himself through a series of spiritual ('vrithanustanas') and physical exercises. Thus he adapts his body and soul for the performance. In this purification-aspect, the performer of the ritual art and the actor in Grotowski meet at a point. Similarly, the audience in ritual arts gets themselves prepared mentally and physically to witness the performance. During performance, they become more purified. There is always a devotional element working in them. Through this, they identify with the actor. But the



audience in Grotowski do not have this devotional element. But all his experiments with the audience was with an aim of their communion with the actor. In his para-theatrical experiments, he tried for an identification of the actor and the audience. The Catharsis effect working in the audience in Grotowski is similar to the purification experience undergone by the audience in the ritual arts. Thus, in the concepts of the actor as well as the audience, the theatre of Grotowski identifies itself with ritual arts in so many technical details.

