

H'wood actor to work with Chhara kids

Star Trek Actor Brian Brophy plans to work with Budhan Theatre and enact a play to help the community reclaim its ancestral place



Actor Brian Brophy conducted a theatre workshop with children

The Chhara community has found a rather glamorous champion in a Hollywood actor. Brian Brophy of Star Trek and Shawshank Redemption fame is set to make a play with Budhan Theatre, the community's theatre group. Brophy intends to enact a play that will initiate a dialogue to help the community reclaim their ancestral settlement land that is currently used as a community space.

The Chhara community is a denotified nomadic tribe that bears the stigma of being known as born criminals. Brophy, who is currently in the city, visited Budhan Theatre in Chharanagar around two weeks ago. "I was moved by the kind of work the community is doing. I realised this theatre deserves better place to for creative thinking and display. The children have immense talent but they need a proper platform to showcase it," said the actor who even conducted a theatre workshop with the children.

"The theatre is in a small place with narrow lanes. I wish to move them out of this space," he added. Impressed with the talent in the community, the 54-year-old actor has decided to work with them. "I intend to enact a play with them that will spread the word about their fight for their rights and help initiate a dialogue for the same," Brophy said.

Filmmaker, playwright, activist and founder of the theatre, Dakxin Bajrange Chhara said, "The initial settlement of the Chhara community was on a land where their ancestors lived. Several governments like Maharashtra have given settlement land to their denotified tribes. We too want back the ancestral land to develop a community space to perform our plays.

There was a home for beggars there some time ago, but that is closed now. If the government allows us to access settlement land and property, Budhan theatre can develop a good library there with a readers section. "Professor Brophy plans to make a play with us which will initiate a dialogue with the government to spread this message. He will be doing so in his next visit in then coming months," Dakxin added.

The Chhara community was indigenous and nomadic people of Punjab region who were notified and settled by order of British colonial government in the 1930s. At the time, they were confined in a colony called Chharanagar and rehabilitated through industrial and agricultural labour.

After independence, they were released from the settlement but many chose to remain, having essentially no resources or other means of livelihood and getting no training for useful skills. The colony still has high walls and barbed wire from the 1930s, which was then a home to rehabilitate beggars.

BUDHAN THEATRE

Founded in 1998, Budhan Theatre is an Indian theatre group consisting of members of the Chhara community, one of India's groups of denotified tribal people in Ahmedabad.

The Budhan Theatre was founded by filmmaker, playwright and activist Dakxin. The troupe practices theatre for community development and social change. The actors perform street plays to raise awareness of discrimination and violence faced by the Chharas and other denotified tribes.

Source: Ahmedabad Mirror, 24 August 2013