

## Nobody's Faces: Real Faces and Hidden Lives Taken to the Stage by a Multi-Ethnic Cast

22 January 2007. Kirindiwella, Gampaha.



Make-up session before the performance

"This is the story of an old man who is married to a young girl. He is sick and needs help, but she does not care about him."

"And this scene is about an unfaithful man. He has two lives: one with his family and one with his mistress. Soon his wife will find out and the family will break into pieces," explains Mr. Safeer, the organizer of Inter Act's latest bilingual (Tamil and Sinhalese) play, *Nobody's Faces*.

"*Nobody's Faces* is an experimental play: it has no beginning and no end. The play is about you and me. The stories performed are small incidents. They reveal the secrets or hidden lives behind a smiling face. They show the real faces behind the masks", Mr. Safeer adds.

This evening, the play is staged in Kirindiwella, Gampaha district. The performance triggers quite a few reactions among the audience.

"There are so many life experiences that are reflected in this show. In one hour, you have managed to capture all the facets of our life", comments a woman. "It is essential to watch this kind of drama. Everyone should do it but many do not have time for it", adds a man.

"Through the play, the audience is free to judge the gravity of the day-to-day conflicts and the efforts taken by the same characters to forget and hide again behind their masks, at least for a while", says Safeer.

"The young actors scripted the play themselves. It is the result of improvisation sessions conducted during three workshops which spanned over 6 months and were organized in Nuwara Eliya, Tangalle and Kotagala", explains Mr. Safeer.

With a cast of 27 actors, whose age ranges from 16 to 51 years, Inter Act's play aims to reach to all types of audiences, from



*Nobody's Faces*: masked characters observe the daily incidents and secret stories of average men and women



powerhouse Colombo to remote villages in Anuradhapura, Tangalle, Gampaha and Kurunegala.

The cast is mostly composed of teenagers and young people of all ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

"They are Muslim, Tamil or Sinhalese. Some of them are housewives, others are accountants, unemployed, school-graduates", adds Mr. Safeer. The actors will perform for the next six months with Inter Act and then return to their town and family.

"This is the first time in my life I am getting on stage", beams Nadeeka Wijenayaka, from Tangalle. "I come from a very small village. In rural areas like Tangalle, we never have the opportunity to participate in artistic activities. This play for me is very special", adds Nadeeka.

"It is not just drama: it is also part of our lives. By engaging in these activities, I can solve my problems: I often feel a lot of pressure being a woman. It is also the first time I get a chance to work with Tamil people as in Tangalle, we are mostly Sinhalese. If we can be friendly with each other through this kind of activities, why can't other people do the same?"

"I am from a very rural area in Nuwara Eliya", says Ananda Raj. "In my village there are no Sinhalese people, we are all Tamils. I was a bit afraid to meet them. I thought they were different from us. Now I feel like we are brothers! We should not have ethnic problems in Sri Lanka. We are all the same."



Nadeeka Wijenayaka, actress, 27 years