

BRINGING CONSERVATION TO LIFE

Insights from a Workshop on
Performing Arts for Conservation

In an era where many people struggle to grasp the significance of climate change amid complex scientific jargon, it has become increasingly crucial to simplify and communicate the message of environmental conservation and climate change in a way that resonates with the general public. As someone deeply involved in wildlife education, who better than me to understand the challenges of effectively communicating these critical issues and making them accessible to a broader audience?



So, I was very excited when I received the opportunity to participate in the theatre workshop organized by the Zoo Outreach Organisation on 29–30 April and 1 May, 2024. The chance to explore performing arts and to see how theatre, a medium I appreciate and which has so much power to engage and inspire, could be harnessed to make complex issues like climate change more relatable and impactful for the general public really caught my attention.

Dharanidaran, a talented theatre artist and founder of Udalveli Arts Foundation, led the workshop. One moment that stands out vividly in my memory is our first task, which was to introduce ourselves uniquely. We had to enter from a designated starting point, walk to a stopping point, and simply state our name, where we were from, and what we liked— without showing any emotion or movement.

This simple exercise helped break the ice and allowed us to learn more about each other. Yet, what struck me most was how challenging it was to withhold emotion. It made me reflect on how naturally we express ourselves through gestures and facial expressions that are part of non-verbal communication which form 70% of all our communication—something that, in theatre, requires practice to control.



Learning about various theatre techniques—such as picture frame dramatization, entry songs, and breaking scenes into distinct frames—was truly eye-opening as the workshop progressed. Dharanidaran also made sure that participants from different states showcased songs in their native languages, allowing us to learn new songs and understand their meanings, which enriched the experience even further. One particular entry song we learned and practiced as a group in the workshop that is a part of most therukoothu performances in Tamil Nadu, "Vandhane denapaarange," felt refreshing and vibrant, adding an energizing element to the workshop.

A notable highlight during the workshop for me was when the Zooreach team and Dharanidaran gave the participants the task of breaking down scenes into different frames with the topic of human-elephant coexistence. Interestingly, in almost every group's performance, the performance somehow subtly blamed the elephant rather than the humans for the conflict.

This pattern highlighted something meaningful—how essential it is to be conscious of the messaging in the stories we portray, especially regarding conservation. It reminded me how easily we might shift narratives and place blame where it doesn't belong. This realization made me even more aware of our responsibility as storytellers, educators, and performers in conservation.

To conclude, the workshop has strengthened my belief that theatre is a powerful medium to bridge the gap between art and conservation, and has given me new perspectives and skills. This has renewed my confidence and I am excited to explore how these ideas can be applied to future conservation initiatives and build new narratives in my work.

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