

Chandradasan:

Assertions assertions ... in theatre, what do you want me to speak about ? You talk about your Karnabharam, you have your assertions there. I don't know. But, when I am speaking in this not-the-drama-seminar, such a session is not possible in the drama seminar. and what makes it different from the 1956 seminar to this day is that you have to see things in a different perspective, may be from the perspective that Aijaz Ahmed was telling yesterday.- a kind of aesthetic imperialism to govern us, to dictate us and tell us what we should do and what theatre is like. So it is this perspective that I find myself doing theatre. In the first place, I have to assert myself. When I look back, the first thing I have to assert is that I am doing theatre itself. I am not doing anything else in the name of theatre. That's the first thing. Then I have to ask what exactly is theatre and go to the basic first understanding of theatre which is a social activity communal activity where things are said between a group of actors to a group of audience who are watching. communication is the first thing to happen. This is different from other forms of art, say a painting or a film or whatever it is. Here a group of people come together to tell something to share something with an audience living in this period of time, at this specific place and time. I may be doing Karnabharam, a story from Mahabharata, I may be doing my bit, I may be doing Tempest all this canonical texts, honoured, celebrated, but what does it mean to me? What can I do with that text to the audience? Is it relevant to us? This is the first question I ask when I start to decide whether I am going to do this play or not. See, if I can not find a link, a direct link with my own life, the life of my own people, then there is no point in doing that play. I think I have done (this) to all my productions. So in case of Karnabharam Sudhanwa had suggested – it is not about the mythical hero but about Karna today in this society. It is about his own pleasures and perils of living. His ideological conflict of living. Who am I? Am I a Brahmin, am I a Shudra? Am I the son of Sun or the son of a Soota? Who is my mother Kunti or Radha? So the questions posed by Bhasa, an intelligent writer, as Karna who always wanted to fight a war, is depressed, and what is going on inside him? The play is... it answers ... The super theme of the play is this question about the caste. This question has become so important in India after 1985. I did the play after- I am not ashamed, I can say that this is the result of Mandal discussions. My production is the result of all the agitations, and the fire that is elaborate in text and performance is the fire I saw on TV people burning for or against Mandal on TV screens. That's where the play comes from. And then this aspect of subverting the text or inverting ... so that I see myself in this performance to give it energy from. That's the first thing regarding the content of the play and then, in doing that, what should be my play like? Theatre has acquired new meanings, new terminologies and new technologies. We have.. wherever I speak, -ve been given – I am repeating this wherever I go, that we are restricting our theatre discourses to the Metro sensibilities, to Euro-sensibilities, which has been instilled in theatre education. Indirectly coming from RADA the NSD and other schools of drama. This concern of the middle class living in the Metro, they are in the discussions. The Praja NATYA MANDALI OR Bihar or Gujrat do not enter the discussions. I believe that this is the cultural colonialism This thing you have to find out. This is a highly political- this is a cultural activity, highly political activity. So in doing so I have to tell my audience that this play is different. Please don't mix it with your understanding of what theatre is. Please don't look for that kind of aesthetics and continuities perfection and tones and all the aesthetic standards by which you understand the play. There is something else in this play.. That I can not say like this , that has to come through the performance. I do it with passion and energy. which I derived and seen in the rural performances, folk performances in Kerala and

elsewhere in the country where Theatre is an ecstasy. You go to an ecstatic level and at that level nothing matters, no aesthetic matters there. Proscenium is broken by itself. I remember Rustom Bharucha blaming Ratan Thiyam. That he can see an invisible proscenium even when the performance is taken outside. The whole blocking, movements, entries, exits, - everything is done for an invisible proscenium, an invisible framework even if it is an environmental production; Rustom Bharucha says. And you know Karnabharam itself has been done on an open platform first, I like to perform in open spaces. We have been performing it in prosceniums like Shriram Centre, everywhere in the country. But then also I tell the audience that this is not a proscenium play. The play should have that design which can take off this sort of refined.. Ramanujam Sir my teacher told me that it should be a little more refined. Refined for the show? I like the way, but it should be refined for the show. It would look better, it would look more aesthetic. Again, in terms of the aesthetic. I have nothing to make it more beautiful. I can do that if its energy is not taken away. If it does not take away the organic flow of the whole thing. And you know, I am not just talking from Karnabharam. I am talking from the present theatre scenario from the point of view of persons like me, my or the generation following me. or, the NTDS period. Here it means—I do not know I read it somewhere ... I forget the name- he called American professional theatre as Show Show (show-show?) where the selling technology is important. Make good cover. Good glitter so that the product 'looks' good. Never mind about the content. Indian Theatre is under this trap. We are trying to make it more shining, in a better cover, in a better selling thing with the help of technology, with the help of many many things. And that is converting productions... I have also started saying 'we have a *show* there'.. not like 'we have a *performance*'.. terms of the show and such kind of things. So this kind of show; show business, merchandise business of the imperial political thing and there are many funding agencies, starting with the government to the many others (who are) operating has their own points to sell. They tell you what kind of theatre they want. Yesterday there were complaints that I have to be 'experimental' to be funded. It is easy to get funding for the experimental. But the logistics of this NTDS seminar, what you are not doing when you do the experimental work. What are you not doing when you do theatre the experimental stuff to get the fund. We have to start addressing these questions I think this may take the theatre scenario of this time beyond Alkazi. I don't have anything personal against him. (He is ?) associated with the NSD he is the great great Guru we can speak about theatre in this language, this forum ... But it has to move forward. I mean In that moment, I think and I believe, I don't know whether I am right or not, it is a rural energy, energy of the village performer. The passion to do the performance. The ecstasy you enjoy with it. And in that case the whole by itself action becomes political. Political play does not mean you are having a simplistic slogan to shout at? so that somebody else can do it. Somebody else can join in your shouting. A political play is also meaning that should not ..be the opposite thing. It should not be so obscure that you have to do a sort of post-modern techniques of signs and signifiers and all those things to dig out what is political about it. And that is happening. That is happening in discourses. It should tell by itself. And you know when I started doing Karnabharam, the left people from my own side, my own comrades were not happy with the play. "You are doing again a Mahabharata story," "This is the thing I am playing I am speaking about brahminism how it is controlling somebody who is so energetic and powerful. This is a tool of them. Are you going to do it again"? So it is not in tune with our declared concept about progressiveness. But later, now, there is no problem, they say it is good, this is a play that should be performed again and again. You have to do it again. Do it strongly enough. Do it like that. I have many experiences of this thing when I am performing in Cuttak, in Orisa,

somebody came and told me after two days, I am a Brahmin. I did not do that. He was very angry. I said then the play is not about you. I performed in Malyalam and it is supposed to be...??? And he is invited two years consecutively to Patna . First year I went to Patna with this play. Next year I have a call from someone are you doing Karnabharam and I said yes. Then are you willing to go to Patna and perform it I said yes yes and then he said the organizers will call you tomorrow and fix it.And next day the organizers called and they said yes we are the same people who called you last year. You have to come and perform and the money etc... .. ? Ok I said fine good and happy but I have an opinion, ? I will come with a new play. He said no no. We want to see the same play again.We want to see the same play once more. That's why he insisted that we come with the same play.And after performing in Patna I was taken out by a group of very young people They introduced themselves as little radical group? From remote areas. They said no if we come out we will be arrested and such things.There were people with arms around but they wanted to ask the same questions about the play.What the Mahabharata can do How can you use this canonical text to subvert? To represent the agony of the oppressed, the dalit and others. There was a long discussion. You see, I am not just saying that I am doing something great or something, but what I was trying to say in the spirit of the seminar It is about position of Indian theatre as such right now.And theatre is, I believe that theatre is a way of writing history. Not just sharing the agonies of this or writing history. It is a way to write that history which is not written by the mainstream historians.What kind of historians they are.Writing the story of the marginalized. It is viewing history from the margins, not the centre. In such a case we think about the past. We think about a dalit who is being killed, for the benefit of , sacrifice for the whole village. And Kerala as else where in India I understand that a lot of human sacrifices are.. and all the human sacrifices were for the betterment of .. This is not a history of very long past.. I think it had been there till hundred years before. But our history does not record these aspects. We don't want to record it. The killed ones also want to forget about it. And the killer also don't want to tell about it. And if the play can talk about this, and if the play is not just talking.. but it emote about the historical aspects. Then the play communicates. And its like that.. Thank you.