

Discussion in response to Prabir, Akshara and Vivek:

1. Sameera Iyengar opens the discussion
2. Ashutosh Potdar – Akshara, Ashutosh. I am Ashutosh. Akshara, while considering television responsible for all those things, but wont you consider society also responsible for this? Well I will give you example. Till last nine months I worked as a lecturer in a college which is a part of village and small town and etc. We had a small questionnaire to collect data because I was unable to bring my students to rehearsals for my street play one act play. So what I asked them that why don't you want to come to the rehearsals. Like what is the problem with this? They don't have any other force to come for the rehearsals or for the theatre. There is no alternate. Like what is alternate. I mean the theatre can't give them alternate to television. And I also feel that society there is losing the sensibility also. It's not that just television is responsible. Because most of them watch television, they enjoy it and they can't enjoy because when I keep my performance I can't keep before 8.30 in the night. And I have to do that performance after 8.30 only. So...
3. Nirmala asks a question to Probir: Nirmala. My question is for Probir. While we understand that copyright is too large for us to really understand, at least in the arts community, I have a small doubt, specifically with theatre. These days, especially in the last four or five years, when someone decides to rehearse a play and because of the digital revolution and if someone sends out an email inviting friends over for a reading and because its on a blog and everybody knows, within three days an email lands up in your mailbox saying that you are not allowed to read this play without taking permission from the literary agents. This is probably a dead playwright; we don't know who the literary agents are. So I just want to know what the legal stand is. Can somebody really take us to court, stop us from reading. Stop us even from performing. If somebody just calls their bluff what is the worst thing that can happen?
4. Vikram Iyengar poses a question to Probir: My question is also for Probir. Vikram, by the way. I wanted to know a little more about the creative license, what was it, creative commons thing. How is it accessible to us as performers, as people who are producing work, specifically for example if we want to, we produce our own music, original music and we want to put out in that domain and we are happy to have people use it. Is this a route that we could possibly take for things like that?
5. Siddharth Narain comments on Akshara's presentation: I am Siddharth. This is just a comment on Akshara's presentation. I don't follow Kannada serials very much, but I have some sense of Tamil and Hindi. But I just have an extreme sense of discomfort with some of the criticism of television in the sense that I understand there is this, a lot of people seem to be suggesting that somehow watching television there is a direct impact that it has on behaviour, on the way we see the world itself. Well I think it is somewhat more complex than that. I don't think spectatorship is that simple. And that viewers often engage with what

is shown on screen and if there are. I think it is also important to understand that our reaction ‘Oh television serials, you know like how Akshara said, they don’t show this and they show this, and therefore they are bad and therefore they have a bad influence. I think we need a much more serious engagement with television in terms of, I would see it more in the sense of looking at how the television industry actually functions in terms of what are the opportunities say for diversity within television itself. Its one of the most unregulated sectors in India today in that sense. What are the kind of opportunities one could have within that space itself. And just as a small example recently I was at a presentation in Bangalore where somebody was actually talking about how they started a Dakkani channel which was extremely popular because it had Dakkani Urdu so it had a particular demand in Bangalore. Unfortunately because Citicable intervened etc, it didn’t really take off. But anyway, the larger point is that I am little uncomfortable. Because television is a different medium and I am not sure if we can directly attribute many of the things that you have said.

6. Rajeev Krishnan-“ what makes people watch for 3 hours...” Just a comment on what Akshara said. One thing that seemed fairly obvious, the presence of the remote. And I find increasingly in theatre the quality of listening is a huge casualty and people feel that even 2 hours is too long. So somewhere the integrity of performance can very easily be compromised. And I also have another question. I read recently that the editing patterns of advertisements now affect the attention span of kids, and I have sat through many movies in the theatre which are extremely slow and dull and boring. And all the things that movies can offer, even if you don’t be pejorative about spectacle, theatre can offer. Theatre has music, dance it can be entertaining, enjoyable, but what is it that makes people sit through 3 and half hours of a film which moves at a snails pace, which is not, maybe apart from the few songs here and there, is not even particularly entertaining. Whereas they hesitate to do that when they have to sit in a theatre. Just something I am curious about.
7. Arjun Ghosh: I will keep it quick. Over the last few years that is something we have perceived in India, more and more companies are remodeling themselves, restructuring themselves. One thing that is happening is retrenchment, that’s another thing. But banks and commercial establishments restructuring themselves. One thing that they do is to change the logos that they have used for so many years. And they get rid of all the verbal things that are there in the logos. They get rid of the mottos which are there and they come up with a sign and a colour scheme and then that is represented on everything else. There is this way to leave out the verbal. And possible thereby I don’t know if it is possible to relate to look for an uncritical kind of commitment or kind of loyalty with the product. I think maybe we can talk about it.
8. Akshara asks Ashutosh: To Ashutosh’s question whether society is responsible or television is responsible. I would like to ask you the question ‘Is there something called society?’ Without the media of seeing it? I think society is basically constituted, to use Sunder’s word, co-constituted by the things we have – language, various literary forms and television. I think today our concept of

society itself is constituted by the television. Therefore when I say that television affects us, it means that television affects us through making that new kind of society. By re-constituting the concept of society itself, it affects us. Not, I mean I don't see that television and society are two different things. And for Siddhartha I don't mean to say that TV's impact on society is very simple, but I can, I could, I took only, what I talked about today is only one part of television, what is normally called as entertainment part. Then there are the news channels, then there are other kind of sports channels etc. etc. and they have their own different kinds of politics which I didn't really go into. For example the ETV this time in Karnataka's election, it innovated a new thing. It would show two politicians and play an old film song. And Yedurappa and Dharam Singh and say I love you, etc. Some and also it made the politics into spectacle. You know, that's what Sadanand was referring to today morning, that you, even the debates about election I feel are spectacle. They really do not actually educate us about politics. It makes us politics enjoyable. It makes politics palatable and just while having coffee you can watch – politics is made into entertainment. So that in effect you become apolitical. You know, that's the agenda of TV. What's it that makes theatre more entertaining, is Rajeev's question. I think human presence. And human presence has its own consequences. Human presence cannot be passive, it has to be active. That human presence itself is I think what makes theatre a very much different. Even if it is boring it is enjoyable. (comment....) This theatre is too long is a recent phenomena. And it is still not there in all parts. If we go to parts of North Karnataka, they want theatre to be very long. I remember an incident which my father used to tell that when in the beginning years of Ninasam, when Ninasam started doing plays, they usually did plays of four hours. It would start at 9 o'clock and then it would go upto 1 o'clock in the night. And one of the villagers they said that when they finished the play at 1 o'clock they said that where do we go now? Do something until morning. Because they had invested so much of time coming into theatre, now we have not invested so much of time. Now we have different ways of reaching the theatre space. We wish that it becomes shorter. So I think there are different reasons for that.

9. Probir Purokayastha asks Nirmala – I think this question about copyright violation which you are being threatened with is something that the community as a whole has to fight. It's very interesting. I believe there is no case. I think they should get, one of those companies or literary agents should sue you. Because that will establish the law. I believe they really have no legal case in that sense, but this is trying to see that India is now a big market, therefore can we recover money from it, is I think a relatively new phenomenon. Earlier they said this market doesn't really matter. People do things it really doesn't matter. So I think it's a new phenomena that is coming up and I think we should legally challenge it at some point but we need to do it when they take us to court and not otherwise. I believe that as far as the copyright act is concerned, we need to really study it carefully and I don't think that we really have. I think that the way the copyright act is constructed there are various defenses you have against it. If you are not selling tickets, fair use is always a defense. Its still there in copyright law. Coming back

to the creative commons, there are two answers to this question. One is that you can very easily get the creative commons licenses by just doing a Google search on creative commons and getting the licenses. That's one very easy answer. But the more difficult answer is what we need to construct. We need a community for this. It's not enough to copy blindly. As you know copyright, you don't have to do anything. You have to just say released under so and so copyright. That's it. So you can say released under creative commons license and then you can put the licenses. But we need a community to understand what creative commons is all about and really get a larger awareness about it, because music is one of the most common ways in which music is being released under the creative commons license. Huge numbers that we are talking about, most of it is really music in that sense. I will poach a little on this question of brands that has been raised. I think there is a different thing happening to the industry. Which is that products are no longer as important as they were. Earlier advertisement was about the product, which is that you had one car which you say the Model T Ford, the classic industrial revolution product in that sense. Mass manufactured product and you could have any colour of car as Ford said, as long as it was black. Now you have Nike shoes which are about 100 types. So therefore you cannot do it the same way as you did a Model T Ford, you have to make the Nike 'brand' popular. So you can see that companies have started really propagating the brand rather than the product. And the brand then piggy-backs onto television. Which acts really as a pipeline to your home. I do like to poach on this issue because Akshara asked me this question 'Can you have community television?' I think there is an important issue over here. Broadcast as a medium creates a passive audience. Whatever you may say, it creates a passive audience because you can only receive it. Now if you see our patterns are changing today because of the internet. You go and see news that you want to hear, look at news you want to hear. Therefore you are actually getting a little discouraged to the broadcast medium where you have twenty minutes of the Bachan wedding, the Aishwarya Rai wedding before they say this other thing also happened, that Israel just blew up about 50 people in Gaza. Now that is something that I as a consumer would like to actively see the news somewhere else. And the internet I think is a platform. That you will not have community television the same way as you have community radio. But you can create virtual communities on the net which will receive and produce news. In fact one of the things we want to do as a group, again a group of people which I really would like to share with you. There is an experiment called Real news going on. Which is really internet based news service. And my interest in it is, I believe that you can replicate in 50 towns, say about 5 lakh starting cost, maybe 50 thousand to a lakh a month cost. And this in that sense if we come together, we create an alternate medium. We create the news as well a community of people which will listen to the news. This community need not be just geographical community, but a community of people who are interested in the same things. The potential is there in the technology. The potential is there. We as creators if we act on it. And I think this is the potential of creating, an active participant rather than just a passive receiver and this is my hope that we still have possibilities and

openings today which we didn't have earlier. (comment on citizen journalist)
Well I think the citizen journalist goes to the BBC or the CNN who then broadcasts it, so therefore it is really again piggy-backing on mainstream media whose purpose is quite different. In fact the mainstream media is very much like the television serials where the idea is 'How many eyeballs can we get.' Because that gives the TRP rating, that gives the ad revenue. It is the ad revenue which sustains the network. It is not the content that sustains the network. So the purpose of the TV as an industry is to get ads in which the news and the serials are only the means to that end. So therefore it's a very different kind of shall we say objective or logic of that industry than what we are talking about. But the opening will not last too long. If we don't do it in the next two, three or five years, I think that opening will go. So it is the time that we create these communities now, before the mainstream media grabs that space and then that's also gone.

10. Vivek Shanbag – talks about new technology of optical fiber – I just want to add one point to what Probir said about TV and entertainment industry and also about internet. There is a new development in the technology which is on optic fibre. As many of you might know, optic fibre is the one which changed the way the internet reached many people. And there are new technological developments which the optic fibre that is developed today has about 1000 times more capability than what is in market. And they are expecting that it is going to come into market in about two years time and this was announced by Bell Labs. Many of the corporate houses which are heavily investing in entertainment industry today are all rehashing their plans and looking at what are the ways in which their investment can be moved from TV industry today and into internet. And it's going to be a very big shift in next five, six, ten years time.
11. Sadanand Menon talks about new technologies- I think when the, lets say the reality of the new reality is opposed in the modern age, well its not the modern age anymore. But in our times the process that comes to mind, the process that is inevitably it is pointing towards is interactivity. And all that Probir is saying and Akshara is saying and Probir is talking about how interactivity can be generated and Akshara is talking about how interactivity is controlled through the television medium. Vivek's point is also about how interactivity suffers in many of the new kind of things that come. But the point is hugely possible. New technologies enable a possibility of interaction. Whether we can do it, is another question. One can investigate this a little bit. I just want to give an example since it is a room full of people who are from the performance background. There is a very, very interesting French group of musicians who are also environmental activists and the group is called Urban Sax and its called that because it is a group of 64 saxophone players. It's an extraordinary group of 64 saxophone players who are also in their other lives they are scientists, they are writers, they are painters and very, very serious environmental activists. Now some of the actions they initiated are very interesting. The very first action they did about six years ago in Arls, it's a small town in France, called Arls. Where they went into this town, they selected a particular area where there was a certain possibility of setting up a community network. They wired up something like 18 square kilometers of that little town in

such a way that at a distance of every half a kilometer, sorry, quarter kilometer there would be a speaker, a speaker system and then they spent about ten days just living in that area collecting garbage. They went from street to street to street collecting garbage. Went into houses and spoke to people and collected their garbage and so on and so forth. They analysed the kind of garbage, they segregated the garbage and from all that whatever could be recycled, particularly plastics they recycled into their own costumes. And on a given day they started a particular musical march from one end of the town, playing their saxophone, wearing this costume made out of recycled garbage, plastic garbage and as they went down the street, slowly from each house came in people with their guitars, with their drums, with their harmonicas and so on and so forth. And by the time they did the entire 18 square kilometers network, just playing the music, which was also playing on the speakers outside, there was a huge group of something like a 1200 odd people who were living in that area were part of this march. And then they ended up with speaking about the problems of environment, of pollution, of garbage, etc. But this meant spending something like 2 full weeks in that area. They have said that in certain places it takes longer because people are suspicious. They don't know why you are doing this. So often 2 to 3 weeks in an area. This means a different kind of engagement for an artiste. It doesn't mean creating just one artistic product. It means being on the street and creating a new kind of interactivity where you are able to talk to people and perform for them and with them. And I think this is a possibility that say today with the new technology it is eminently more possible, its much more possible today. Whether one would like to take that risk, whether one has that kind of time or even a sense of politics is a different matter. I mean for example what Mala presented earlier is about going into an area and talking to people and responding to that in a particular way. Sometimes it has to be a hit and run kind of thing, sometimes you have to invest time and what do you say, a certain commitment to it. Because if you don't do this, then what is happening to all arts, not just to theatre, I see it happening in the visual arts. Today Indian visual and plastic arts, you know the prices are soaring and they are big hits in the international market. All painters are getting famously rich and so on and so forth. But the content of the work is not necessarily touching anybody. It has just become something that you play with numbers. It's like a stock, blue-chip investment. Something one would like to call supply side aesthetics. So if one doesn't get into this, then one of the dangers is what a very, very wonderful art historian called Hal Foster has spoken about, has written about recently in a very important book where he says 'The finest art work today (and I am just responding to Akshara because he used the word mall so many times) is as Hal Foster says, the finest work of art today is the shopping mall. It is constructed to be a work of art. It's a combination of architecture and various other things. Constructed to be that house of desires, that house of expectations, the greatest work of art is the shopping mall and the most aesthetic thing you can go and do today – is to go and shop!

12. Indu Chandrashekhar talks about copyright – Just a couple of small points. This is with reference to what Sainath said this morning about inequalities and what

Probir spoke about copyright which I suppose basically has to do with ownership at some level. Just two small points. And in relation to what Nirmala raised. One is I believe that copyright vesting in an institution, or an authority or a corporation has to be viewed differently in an unequal world. This whole business of Microsoft that Vivek mentioned – getting people in India hooked onto certain kinds of software, offering it free very often, in schools, educational institutions, etc. Literally getting them addicted to a certain diet of software and then coming down on these same users of your software through Nasscom and other governmental regulatory bodies in such a manner. As once you are addicted to it, its difficult for you to change to another product, whether it be Linux or any other software that is freely available. I think one should see it as, basically your stand should be ‘listen if Microsoft is willing to offer that software to me at an Indian rupee rate, I might go out and legally buy it.’ Because you own that software, you have patented it and we could talk. Otherwise flout that regulation would be my instinctive feeling because it is an unequal bargain. And the other thing about ownership is I think there is some merit. Having said that there is some merit in a person, an author, a playwright, a song writer, a musician who originates a work of art, a piece of literary text, having the right to be asked permission before that work is used. I don’t think we should translate all rights to a financial arrangement. Very often all that authors wish to get from the use of their work by other constituents is acknowledgement. That that idea, or that work originated in somebody or an institution or in a body of ideas. So without even having to go into the legal realm of the copyright act, I think we should recognize the moral realm of the authors rights to that. Beyond that, to answer your question, a reading of a play in a (and Siddharth will bear me out on this, I don’t know if I am right), the reading of a play cannot be subject to the law. You are not doing anything illegal. I think it might depend on the numbers who gather for that reading. But to produce a play that has been scripted by an author you would definitely need permission from that author which need not translate into a fee is what I am trying to say. But acknowledging that this work has been written by or produced by somebody is I think fair.

13. Sameera Iyengar invites Sanjoy ganguly and Vikram Iyengar....One of the reasons we wanted to...One of the reasons we wanted a new realities session is exactly what Vivek said and what we discussed yesterday, that we want to look at the nature of engagement when things change around us. So I would like to call Vikram and Sanjoy.
14. Probir Purokayastho responds to indu – I think if Microsoft is hooking people like kids are hooked to cigarettes, I don’t think piracy is a good answer. We really need to go to free software.
15. Sameera Iyengar introduces Sanjoy. Can I call Vikram and Sanjoy...