

Koushik Sen: I would like to quickly respond to what Samikbabu started saying, about the relationship between the performing body and the community body. And I would like to throw some light on the present situation in West Bengal, because we do our theatre there. As Samikbabu had already mentioned, we are under a Left Government for the last 30 years. Bengali theatre always had a very strong Left inclination, the theatre which emerged from the famous Nabanna. What happened after 1977 – this is my personal feeling – that we, the theatre workers, after a particular point of time, we were very confused. We are going to speak against which party? Because the party which we supported, now it is in power. The entire 1980s was under this confusion.

After a long period of time, now in West Bengal, there is a very interesting kind of a situation. After what happened in Singur and Nandigram. The entire scenario has changed, and it has changed very quickly. Samikbabu was referring to that famous rally which came up, which was led by a poet. Historically, after that Kolkata has seen ... West Bengal has seen ... a lot of demonstrations, a lot of political upheaval. But very recently, after Nandigram issue, there was a huge rally. This was the first time we witnessed in Kolkata, in West Bengal ... 14th of November, a huge rally came out on the streets. Actually I'm not talking about the rally, actually I am talking about a particular incidence ... I'm referring to one of the leading poets of Bengal, Shankho Ghosh. Just before the day of this rally, he said that, "I'm not going to be part of this rally if I find a single politician in the rally. Even the Opposition." That demand of the poet, it spread, and almost all the theatre workers, intellectuals, poets, they stuck to this point. We appealed to all the Opposition political leaders, who are equally worthless for the last 30 years. We told them, "please don't come to this rally. This is our rally. We have to find our own way."

I was reading through Sudhanva's paper yesterday night, where in a particular space he says that "this is the same party that ushered in the emergency in 1975, and launched a semi-fascist terror in West Bengal which killed amongst others, Ashish Chatterjee of Theatre Unit in 1972 and Prabir Dutta of Silhouette in 1974." Actually, I'm quoting these lines because, this is the same party which is tying up with the Left government and naturally ... how can you explain this to the people of West Bengal that the Communist Party is taking a particular stand in the Centre and a completely different stand in West Bengal? And this is where, the performing body and the respondent body, there is a clash between these two completely different forces.

If you now go to Kolkata, you'll find that Kolkata has changed very fast. The Bengali middle-class audience has always given the maximum amount of patronage to this Bengali theatre. The middle-class is changing very fast. The place where I stay in Bhowanipur – there are some areas called Shakhripada, Kasharipada – you'll find the old Calcutta there. And if you cross Elgin road, you'll find it has changed so fast. You'll find the shopping malls are there, you'll find the flyovers are there. These are the things which ... in using the word 'politics', if we want to know each other and if we want to really make a common forum, if we really need to know in what ways we are doing theatre in different parts of our country, we also have to be really clear about these things. What we actually feel ... I mean, there's no reason to keep politics aside, and we have to be clear about these things. What kind of a politics we believe in. That is a very important factor now because we want to know each other well. It is not the question of, in what kind of a space we are doing theatre, in what kind of condition we are doing theatre, but in the ambience, in the total situation under which we are performing.

After a long time I find that the situation in Bengal has radically changed and that is making some effect on our theatre also. We want to do street plays now. We want to go to the people. As one of my friends Vikram said, on behalf of Swapnasandhani we are performing in a particular space. A small space, not one of the major auditoriums of Calcutta. We are performing there every Saturday, and we are not giving insertions in any widely popular newspapers. Even after 3 years, we find that its not enough; we have to do something more. This situation, the present situation in West Bengal, has given us this opportunity to think completely in a different way. We have to improvise ... this is a kind of a situation where I would love to know about your views, about what happened in West Bengal. Because what happened in West Bengal ... I don't believe it will never happen again. After Nandigram and Singur, the police attacked brutally on Left Front Allied, that is, the Forward Bloc. And still no Commission has been done. And what really is alarming is that, after the Nandigram issue, 14 people were arrested and none of them were punished. All of them were left.

So theatre... everything affects this. Everything effects in our theatre. That's what my quick response is.