

Discussion and Response to Pathologies

1. Vikram Iyengar, third respondent speaks
2. Chandradasan responds to Akshara's session – You have to analyze from the viewer's point. Who is watching what? I have done some work with my students, the younger generation I work with. And you know the younger generation is watching the musical channels only. They are going for what is there on the music channel. What is in a Hindi movie, a Hindi film song or a Tamil film song or whatever it is. So approach is right, the sphere with which you are working is already slipped off. In Kerala it is not there. No serials in the prime time. In Kerala there is no serials in the prime time. I am just telling that if you are going to have a sociological approach on the affect of mass media, you have to have this also in mind.
3. Sameera Iyengar talks about examples – Can I just intervene here. If I can just intervene for a second here. I think these are simply examples from which one can take thoughts and go ahead. I don't think Akshara is encapsulating a reality for everyone. As much as saying from his example there are certain concerns that come out, which need to be engaged with.
4. Ashok Tiwari –“ where have our nani dadi gone...” Hindi
5. Akshara KV comments - I will very briefly, one line responses. In Kannada also it is happening. Actually now one programme which is becoming most popular is called 'Yedatumba Haadudari'. It's a competition based programme and if you do minor changes to my argument it applies to that also. You know, you can actually extend my argument with minor adjustments; the same analysis will apply to that also. And the second thing is that my responses to TV, I was not trying to do sociology of television. I was not trying to do, you know, how the contents affect people. Because then we enter into a different kind of a debate and there your questions can be answered in different ways. People might also say that if some values are going, some new values are coming. For example, we have recently commissioned one symposium in Desha-kala on Television. And J Devika from Trivandrum who works in the Centre for ??? CDS, she has mentioned that some of this disco dancing programmes are actually enabling, they are actually helpful to for some people to get away from their restrictions, the social restrictions and also the mental inhibitions that they have. So let us not just do that. If we start doing that kind of a sociological analysis, I think we have there both sides to the exercise and we will have to do it completely. I would just say that you know I was not going into that exercise. I was trying to do a more fundamental thing, that as a technology itself it has some problems. I was just trying to mention that.
6. Arudhati Nag comments – I just wanted to place on record that as a community, number one, the majority of the practitioners and amateurs in theatre in India do not earn money from this activity and we do not have a professional theatre, at least in Karnataka we do not have that kind of professional theatre that can sustain them and that is clearly the reason why we are losing trained actors to the television. People cannot pretend to have money. We find it excessively difficult

in an urban situation like Bangalore at least, to find actors who can come, who will not be, we cant afford to give them transportation, we cant afford to feed them, and yet we want world class performances. We are not able to sustain that handful of people in a city like Bangalore who have decided that they want to do only theatre. They don't want to do anything else. They have invested two years, three years in training at NSD or Ninasam and then we do not have a livelihood to give them. If we can work towards maybe sharing ideas on how smaller modules of maybe repertoires which are put together for a year and dismantled also at the end of a year. I am sure we would be able to take the benchmark of this amateur theatre that all of us represent, to a certain level of professionalism and we would have actors who would willingly come and do theatre and practice theatre. That might be one of the ways of stopping the exodus. It is very difficult to pretend to have money.

7. Sunder Sarukkai-“how do you engage technology...” Akshara, when you called the TV a weapon, I think you stopped halfway. You called it weapons of mass destruction; in that case Bush would have sent his troops to take care of it. But that apart, and the question is that how do you engage? I mean this is a question which we have been discussing in a different context. How do you engage with new technologies in traditional Indian theatre? I am adding this question onto yours because television is just one representation of a larger technological change. Specifically in the way in which images are created and so on. As since theatre has a specific engagement with image making, this notion of either you look at television as something outside you or alienated from you or the exploration of the possibilities in which television becomes a part of the medium of the kinds of theatre that is done. Do you think that's one way of engaging with it or do you think it is something essentially inimical to the process of theatre itself.
8. Akshara –“As long as I don't need...” I wouldn't negate the possibility, but personally I don't have an answer for that. Because for me I still have, I am still left with the possibility of story telling and the human body. I have still not exhausted the possibilities you know that are there in storytelling and the human body. At the moment I don't need these projections etc, are not necessary for my theatre. So as long as I don't need, when I really exhaust the possibilities of the body, the mind and story telling, then I will look at the possibilities of technology. At the moment I haven't found the reason for doing that. There are people who are doing that. Some of them seem interesting to me, but to a very limited extent.
9. Ajay Joshi –“Project in Panchagani Zila...” I just want to respond to three people here. This is Akshara's example of the television and its effects; Sanjoy your work in the villages, and when you are talking about story telling, I would like to quickly share my personal experience. I am working in about 16 villages in a place called Panchgani. These are the villages which are just about 2 kilometers off the main track, the most affluent track between Panchgani where the most educated intelligentsia go for their holidays. And the children which I am working with are all from the 1st to 4th standard in Zilla Parishad schools. Schools where cupboards with books are locked up because children would otherwise tear books,

anyway. So I realized when I did a survey in these villages, that children don't know that there are books, story books. They just knew that there is something called history and whatever they teach them in that standard. We started this project using only storytelling, poetry and storybooks. And we have been conducting this kind of programme for students of 1st to 4th standard. We have set up a mobile library over there which is extremely cost effective per person and you can just name it. I have trained women who are just 7th or 8th pass from the villages to work as, we call them sanghatikas, or pustak pari, okay, the book fairies and the most interesting part is, I will not go into the details of how it all works. But after six years of this particular programme being run in these 16 villages, two distinct things happened. The first thing was many people migrated from other villages to these villages because children are being given books to read and there is story telling and poetry happening, one. Secondly I extended this programme onto the mothers who insisted that they also wanted to read. So now I have extended literacy to the mothers. The third most important thing is after doing this survey the children have cut down watching television which unfortunately has reached these remote villages. So this is little bit of example sharing with all the kind of work that you are doing.

10. Sanjoy Ganguly talks about Jan Sanskriti's work – I am just taking the opportunity of talking about some work done by Jan Sanskriti. Currently we have been performing on education. You know as you know, I have been saying this repeatedly that the change in government sometimes is necessary. Like I personally feel in West Bengal after 31 years they should go. But while making an effort to change the government you should not ignore the other parts. Like when you are talking about the human index, education, health and you know the basic things that is related to our livelihood. So we have been addressing the whole question of education. Because the quality doesn't exist particularly in the places where scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are living. So we decided to understand the perception of the people, the people's perspective as to what is quality. And how an interesting effective reform can be brought about into the system. So therefore we have decided to perform hundred shows per month. So in one year we have started this from January, in one year we will be performing 900 shows. Because 3 months there will be monsoon. And in these 900 shows we have been receiving interventions from the people, we are recording it, Praticit India Trust, they are helping us in documenting the informations and then we will be analyzing this. And after analyzing this, the ground level people will be analyzing and then it will go to the academia. And this is how we will establish a link between the people at the ground level and the people at the academic level. And this will come as a form of report in 2009, sometime in March or something like that. So where, when we are doing this you always think that theatre is not enough really. Theatre is an effective tool that can democratize the research methodology, that can democratize the politics, that can create an intellectual space, but more than that you have to act outside the stage and also like what we do, same play we take to the same audience at least three times, with an interval of one and a half months or two months. The first time when we perform, this is a

collective action. So then they are going and they are reflecting. In this period two months we give them tabloid magazines where we provide informations related to education. How much is allotted to buy rice for the ICDS centre. So all this information from the government and the non government level we give them. So they read it, all spectators they get it and then after two months when they intervene, their interventions are changing. So we are trying to follow the rational change in their interventions. So theatre, providing information and extending our act outside the stage, all three are to be brought together to really bring some changes in our reality as I feel.

11. Arundhati Nag talks about sustenance – How do you sustain this activity? 900 shows in a year.
12. Sanjoy ganguly asks about funds from CRY – Actually this particular project, this one hundred shows is going to be supported by CRY, but money has not yet reached. As we don't receive, we still haven't received any foreign institutional grant, we don't have the permission. Basically all our satellite teams, they are independent. We don't pay them any money. Like when you are talking about amateurism and professionalism, you know all our theatre activists, they are amateur because they are agricultural workers, marginal farmers. They have their own profession and when they find time in the evening they perform. And they have their own funds. After the harvesting, during harvesting they go door to door collect paddy and they sell this paddy and get the funds. So each satellite team has their own fund. So we don't that way, but even then there are teams even then they don't get money. They are 18 years 19 years old. And recently we had a spectators rally in Calcutta. People couldn't imagine as per the police report it was there were 12000 spectators. 12000 spectators they came to Calcutta with a demand that we want the access to the world of art. Because art is highly elitized even though a left government has been ruling there for 31 years. You know they did not extend the art at that level where people can really grow, can empower themselves. So it was that demand. We told the journalist, ... was there and he said that there are some days that never exist for the first time. It was his first sentence. And we told the journalist, talk to every individual and see whether they have seen our play or not. Thousand and thousand people sang the same song of our play. Lot of women came with their conch shells. So it was 12000 people. They demanded that they want access to the world of art. So people really like to act, by nature they are not passive. I am not romanticizing optimism, though I would love to romanticize it. But this is a fact I am telling you.
13. GP Deshpande – Its good that the discussion has come back to Akshara's paper. I think that some problems of understanding here. Akshara can correct me. The scope of the paper was rather limited. In fact it is really the, what one might say commercial quote unquote acting, quote unquote commercial selling of entertainment objects is what he is really talking about. And therefore to connect it with the rise of the Modis is a bit too hard to take. There are all kinds of governments in this country, the same television goes to people. The serials are not particularly different from one language to another. It is not as though somewhere it produces Modis, somewhere it produces Mayawatis. Both 'M',

that's the only common feature. Therefore I think somewhere this junk, there is too much of an inductive leap. Connecting it with politics. The second thing which has been worrying me over the last five days in fact in a way, where we seem to assume that all is well with theatre. Problem is with every other art. I mean this has been going on for five six days. We seem to be merrily believing that here is theatre, here is stage song, if you want to see the models, come, go there, you will see the magic of Indian theatre. The fact of the matter is that the commercial professional theatre in many parts of the country is in fact declining. Audiences are going down in cities like Pune or Mumbai, the audiences are actually going down. People who used to pay hundred rupees, two hundred rupees, they are going down. In fact there is a theatre in Borivili where the Gujarati plays happen. People are forever coming in and going in discussing share prices, then going in, watching a play for ten minutes then coming out again, discussing another share prices. These are the facts of our theatre. I think one thing that we got to avoid, it is not only romanticizing optimism, we seem to be romanticizing everything about theatre. Without reference to the actually declining state of spectatorship. Creating spectacle when there are no spectators to see that spectacle. Declining number is what we don't seem to worry and we don't seem to worry that people don't any longer, the urban audiences don't even understand languages now. What does it mean? You may have the right kind of message to give in Bengali or Kannada or Marathi or whatever. The Bengalis or the Marathis or the Kannadigas wouldn't understand what is being said. Then what are you going to do. Increasingly that is the situation. Over last ten years there is a decline not only of the audiences to the theatre, there is also decline in the readership of the plays. The finest, the best sellers are now translations of cheap romantic novels. Somebody like, there is a very famous writer I am told called Shobha De. Somebody of that name. That is what is going on. We are discussing theatre without any sense of the crisis. That's where we are heading. Rest tomorrow.

14. Surendra Rao speaks – I am Surendra from Samudaya Bangalore. I was very frightened when Akshara told that people are working with him around Heggodu have been communalized. I am really frightened now. It is in this background that he told the effect of television and the minds of the people and most of them have been almost communalized through TV, TV programmes, like that. It is here the responsibility of theatre, which is a tool of democratizing people's minds. I feel we have to invent and re-invent our own folk forms of theatre and go to the people and say whatever we want to say. I think that is what Akshara....
15. Sameera Iyengar speaks – I think we should close this session here, as it's been a really long day. There is just one story that I wanted to leave you with. Simply because part of this, I don't know, I find a session like new realities really tough session because you are trying to engage with so many different things and there are lots of bits and pieces that are coming out in my head, but they are not coming together yet. But the need... Ok. So the story. I had gone to a meeting in Salzburg in August, and no, it doesn't matter what the month is. There was this lady from Texas who was there, representing an art museum and she was every bit your stereotype of the American lady from Texas that you can think of. But she had a

fantastic story to tell. And her story was this. Her parents were Jewish immigrants to Texas. They were business people. They set up a mall. A long time ago. But they also happened to be lovers of art. So they set up this mall with the shopping complexes with all the shops. And this is the beginning of mall culture in the US and its big money. But what they also did because they loved art; is they put Rodin statues in there. Right, so you had this mall which had fantastic sculptures in it. Simply because these people loved sculpture. So you had a population who was flooding the malls, who was coming to the shops and they were all kinds of people, and they came in and they saw Rodin. And they saw other great sculptors. And they got used to seeing, and they were very carefully placed in the malls. And the mall had lawns and it was placed around the lawns. So you had this Texan and this is not just American public, this is Texan American public, its George Bush land. So you had this mall with this area around it which had art. And what happened is that an entire generation got used to accessing art in a certain kind of way. And after her parents death what has happened is that all that art has now gone in, not the art in the malls, they had so many pieces over their lifetime they had collected, that they have set up an art museum and you actually have a general public who goes into the art museum because of this sort of engagement with art that happened. I just thought that this was a lovely story not because it happened over time, but I also thought it was a lovely story because it was another kind of engagement that happened. It was an innovative idea. And for me part of why it is important to think about a new realities session is to actually engage with what is out there today. If you are committed to this, then how do you get into that engagement to make sure what you believe in, what your art form is, what your politics are, etc. gets forward. So I just wanted to share this story. Thank you everyone.