

Pralayan:

Thank you friends. First of all my apologies for not having prepared a paper and I have also not given notes for respondents. Sorry for that. I will try to speak in English and partly switch on to Tamil and with the help of friends. Before coming I have some assertions in a situation where theatre is not professionally developed, where theatre is not socially patronized. Then how do we understand our contemporary theatre practice. How we assert its passion, positivism... I leave it to you. You see the debate over assertion is century old in Tamilnadu. Along the lines of caste gender and everything. I do not want to go into the history over here. I want to say about theatre of the last 20-25 years. In early 1990s there was a strong debate centred around Tamil national theatre. Tamil Aranga Tamil siyarang?... Tamil adaiyar rang and so on. Tamil theatre, Tamil National Theatre, Tamil theatre with Tamil identities. It demands for a new theatrical idiom and the development of a new theatrical language which is rooted in Tamil culture and so on... See the importance of that debate, most of the theatre practitioners participated in that debate by contesting it or by affirming it. No one is out of that debate. They made some notable points in that debate. - they started discussing about the form. We are discussing here about form and content but they were discussing form. Content was political but form itself as politics - the importance of that debate, then Dalit theatre came into existence and feminist theatre followed. All these scenes and practices are part of reality in Tamilnadu now. - Dalit theatre and communist theatre. Now there is another trend, a new theatre group for trans-genders. Practically all trans-sexuals are doing theatre about themselves. Like I am the singer and I am the song, lot Dalit theatre song - all that is a reality in Tamil theatre now. Here I want to sidestep that. They found the group called it Kannadi ---- and established miral theatre group like that - See, they are doing a play about themselves. They want a space in our society they want to make society aware about themselves. See what happened that all members of trans-sexuals there are Mustafas, there are Arumugams they have undergone operations and they are trans-sexuals and there are new names. But all of them call themselves as Arwanis. { That is the Tamil name for trans-sexuals. The name lineage goes to the Mahabharata story. The Arwan is the one given to someone who is given as a human sacrifice on the previous day of the eighteen day war. The condition for the person to be sacrificed is that that person should be a virgin and married. So one of Arjuna's son was chosen to be the one to be sacrificed. Because he has to be married they married him with a eunuch. Lord Krishna took the form of a eunuch and married him to an Arwan. Then the marriage Kangan was given as a sacrifice. So there is a belief, a myth that all eunuchs are the wives of Arwans. They are Arwanis. Whatever their background - whether they are Mustafas or followers of David, they all take the same name. I asked why they want their identity and again get lost in this majoritarian discourse. This debate is going on. Now they find another neutral term - called Tirunagai - a name to identify them. But sensitivity to this identification along the lines of caste gender is not that much needful in practice. In a language based culture the thinkers say that language played a great role in creating the culture and so on. In this connection I recall - Periyar. Actually T.V. Ramswami Periyar. He criticized Tamil language for its caste biased, gender biased structure and openly called it a barbarian language. He wanted to sterilize the Tamil language which constructs and legitimizes caste inequalities, gender inequalities, so he sterilized that and coined new words to expose the inadequacy of Tamil language like the Desabhimanam - a word for patriotism. Muhiyabhimanam - love for the language and he also coined a word Karparibhimanam - outward chestism. He coined these kinds of words and ... Karpabhimanam he coined these words. This kind of sensitivity to assertions and ... for the last fifty years... and now you can ask a question as to whether present day theatre practice in Tamilnadu represents the sensitivity

to the assertions. Yes. To some extent. Something happened in Tamil theatrical scene –yesterday also we were talking about two faces of truth... .. with ...also. In our Tamil traditional theatre yettarikuttu was a popular theatre form in North Tamilnadu. Women were not allowed to perform in the traditional theatre. Because it is ritualistic and so many reasons given by the practitioners. But what happened now there is an all women group doing terukuttu in Tamilnadu. In one production women were not allowed to wear the buza geeti ... and all the external aharya /costume. They can't even touch them. So when performing ... women are not allowed to touch the costumes and ornaments. One woman who was performing Amba was wearing all the ornaments that were not allowed by traditional practice. All the percussion instruments are made of the skin hyde so they are not allowed to touch them. they were not allowed to do some movements because those movements were not modest. ...like raising the leg over the head like what the Russian Ballet dancers would do easily...no? Now what happened- all women group performing Tappu. They broke all the norms. Ten years ago there were many all women groups doing Tappu with the banned movements. I can say several groups did plays that dealt with assertions like Prof. Ramanujam's --- Indira Parthasarathi's ---K.A. Gunashekharan's Maliadigai?...Mangai's paniti? And Illiap... --- as you say problem of the contradiction within national identity. It is a reflection of all these assertions. But the problem is ... In most of the open air performances it is different from proscenium stage. There all the characters whether dalit or women are presented as victims. Initially it has been accepted...praised...? For it sensitized the society –initially. But when you discuss it deeply, you should understand the representational problem—how it helps to empower the section of the people. And also there is a dominant trend? There are these division... caste... and gender..class everything in the caste oppression has been in the media expressions- representation is approached as an object for them. It is an external one. It goes beyond ourselves. It goes, does some repairs and comes back. It is external object of inquiry but in reality it is a subject. Caste or gender. That discussion is taking place now. There are very serious dialogues have been made. And another important point-Performance. In all our traditional performance the audience space is divided along caste lines. Still. Till today Non-dalits have a separate performance. Therukutu or ...Nadagam and what happened in northern districts of Tamilnadu, if dalits are coming to the performance, they have to take the last seats. They would never be in the first row. If dalits are having a separate performance then they don't want to see a non-dalit in the audience. If they are there, they are invited and given seats in the front row, and respected. That's the rural situation. But in urban place doing contemporary plays from villages, it never breaks the caste lines and segregations among the audience. Even we- Magic Lantern used to perform the same way. Audiences are divided into hoors and cherys. Their places of living are different and the audience is different according to the locality. In some places where dalits and non-dalits were together politically mobilized under one umbrella, you can get audience that crosses over the caste lines. Very few places. We used to perform in that situation also. Among the performers, there can be a mixture. Dalits and non-dalits can be together in a performance. But in the audience there should not be a mixture. I will site an example from northern parts of Tamilnadu in Dharmapuri district one performer was dalit, he was doing a leading role in a traditional performance. He is doing big roles, what happened you know, he used to perform in a village near the temple. There is a shop run by a Brahmin. The shopvondor's daughter used to be in the shop. After eighteen days performance he had an affair with that girl and they married and eloped. So now they are living together. It happened, but at the audience level, there should not be a mixture. The segregation still rules. So these are some of the anecdotes I have given for the discussion.

Thank you.

18.41

Pralayan's speech is repeated. Plus there is the following:

Pralayan recites lines of Tamil poem

This means 'I don't know who you are, You don't know who am I Like that... 'My parents are not related to your parents and actually it is a dialogue between the lovers. My parents do not know about your parents and their lineage and your parents do not know about mine With these different backgrounds how can we come together If the rainwater falls on the rich soil how it becomes one...Like that it is a song. It is a celebration of love that has crossed the boundaries of caste lines and identities and everything. It is an ancient tradition but I do not want to say that ancient Tamil society is casteless or any such thing... But there is a tendency to celebrate this crossing of the boundaries so what happened now is different again I site an example from poetry and then I will finish it This is contemporary poem, written by Meera from the varan? Bodies It goes, 'You are a bank employee and I am a bank employee

You are a vllhala am also a vellhala that is an upper caste It is followed by the same words.