

S Ramanujam:

Friends, I should thank Mr. Pravin who is responsible for making my presence here, I was not aware of the Theatre forum, some few days back he asked me to come here, I was not available to prepare a paper, but I'll share my ideas about the experiment here.

I graduated from NSD in 1967 and straight away never returned to Delhi, only confining myself to Gandhigram village and Kerala park. Only working there in theatre. We.. for us Sankarapillai is a great man in theatre in Kerala, he started the Kallari movement. Natyakallari movement in 1967. Theatre workshop ... the name experiment was added to the theatre not by the organizers but by the audience. *They* said "they are 'experimenting' in theatre."

One simple thing was what they had done there, the first thing I helped Pillai in a production where I took the responsibility for lighting. I simply mounted the light on the top and made some lighting design which I got from my guru Dasguptajee, and with some indigenous material I conducted some fade-ins and fade out. People said some very good experiment in lighting. It was new to *them*. Actually I experimented there not with the lighting design or something, but with the materials available there, no materials were available there, I tried to use water... dimmer other things...

The next one, when you begin to teach.. What was happening at the time was it is a kind of orientation given to theatres, orientation to the technicians, actors, and orientation to the audience also. That process is now... known as experimental theatre.

Because, even the audience began to call it experimental, and then the producers started to give an apologetic tone, saying this is an experimental production you have to excuse us. It is a convenient thing to apologise in the know..

Then slowly what happened... some important happened. When Shrijandalnayar produced KALI, for which Arivindan was in charge of set design, and I was in terms of lighting. It failed. It completely failed because SNayar tried to work with the regular actors who worked with the regular commercial troupe there. They were not able to cope up with things like movement, grouping, they were not able to cope up with this kind of things.

Another import... another incident I'll remind here. You know, Karanji had done BBiedre Bhishma???? with Surabhi, from Andhra. I invited this troupe to Calicut, ??? will know... he was there in Calicut.. When it was presented.... was directed by Karan. , written by Roy???? Acted... the presentation was done by surabhi... the traditional form of theatre in Andhra, famous theatre. Within 15 minutes... except few people everybody left the auditorium. <audience laughs> It's a sad tone... and ummm.. one person, some of the persons observed by that time these Kallari was in Kerala, and some of the in people were able to know something about theatre, something about the presentation everything, they saw good presentation also, because the first drama festival was done Ernakulam by that time. And they were able to see some of the important productions of India. Like Habib Tanvir, Karanth, and... all the great people they were presenting piece there. ???

So.. Someone else person came to Karanth and said, Karanthji, we expected more.

Initially???? there was an interaction between the Karanth and the spectators there, and then Karanth said one word.. 'I like it' I think perhaps we can take it a kind of definition of what is experiment also there... karanth began by saying I may be disappointed you, don't think I have cheated you. It's a very good thing. I may be disappointed you, don't think I have cheated you. Its important thing.

Any attempt with earnest mind and with an earnest approach without cheating is an experiment. That is a definition you can put there. It is true. Because.. as an experimeinet itself... There is only one group in India with 67 members, 33 are females, and that troupeis living by theatre alone, travelling from one drama to other gram. Putting some shows, collecting tickets, and looking within the group, they are intermarried, and have a whole family. And Karanth said we have to help these people, and try some... slowly they are deteriorating...??? They are not able to live. Karanth tried to help them, but it was very difficult to make the people cope up with new approaches and other kind of things. Till now they still are some subsidy given by government. I am sad to say when there was a performance in Hyderabad I went to see, there were 6 people including me.

So Theatre is a space, where whatever you do it becomes an expermiment. Every production is an experiment. In between there was so many schemes came interacting with our traditional forms, and we began to use some of the devices, some of the elements techniques from the theatre forms and mixing... some good productions came, it came in a wave and went there.....but there were good theatrical elements discovered by in that moment... but unfortunately there was no further follow up work to collect these theatrical elements and make it a kind of pure theatrical element to be trained to our actors... we can evolve a good acting system out of our traditions. Now what happened there, some Kallaripayti is given in Kerela, from some thing Manipuri... and these people learn something here and mix it there, and that people learn something mix there and bring here, only some devices in each production there. But .. mingling these kind of forms and making strong exercises for the actors to develop themselves, for the modern theatre practice, this is the challenge, we have to fulfill this challenge. If we do this exercise... I think we have to collectively do this exercise, not independently. In the morning I liked this discussion, I liked him because he given me.. the body inside, the body inspace, the body coming out of the ??? value.. why we have to find a common source of elements or way of expressions. Where we have to find a common source or elements or ways of expressing in which the theatre can come together and become a common experience to everybody. Otherwise, some regional devices can be put as the exhibitions, some of the regional devices are taken there and used only as 'exhibits', and people are very much pleased with exhibits and what is there.

Experiments is something that is always going on there. It never ends there. Each and every production is an experiment, means that the director wants to make from the beginning, it means that theatre is a very difficult medium, there are so many sides, each technical aspect is a side itself, the actors, his dress and his make up, are three sides, three signals. They have to collect these signals and present a kind of a communication and experience. So if you want to give that kind of experience, then how to control the variables. There are many variable aspects there. So to control the variables is a very difficult thing. Normally a research in theatre is difficult because of the non availability of controlling the variables involved in the theatre. I just now was

saying to the chair man .. one thing happened. I was in the interview committee at a university in which somebody else appeared for the lecturers post. He had not done any research, research studies. I asked how many productions you had done there. He said he had done seven productions.

How it they received

He said Well received.

I think he had done seven researches, seven studies. Because in the result is designed by, known by, the result is known by the experimentalist – who is doing the experiment. As far as the theatre is concerned, the result is known by the audience. If one production is failed, even if they are putting a large amount of good effects, a large amount of experiments, if it fails there we find it is a failure production, it (the audience?) does not accept what is done there. It is measured by the response of the audience, not by the amount of experiment done by the director there. This is an important thing in the theatre.

Whether some person, even Pralayan, he knows how that made the people there, how he is using things, each one.. at one side... I made an an experiment with juvenile delinquents, the children, and they wanted kind of a production on value orientation. Personally I didn't like that. A value is not oriented with one or two productions there. A values is only where a production can help to ???/.. Today a value can be oriented in a kind of living system.

So when I had this kind of experiment with Juvinile Delinquents. Slowly I tried to develop a plot. To my astonish everyone was kind to each other, they evolved a playplot in which a monkeys helped an elephant get out of a pit. So, it's a good value, 'helping other people is a good value'. Another thing... an experiment, if I call it an experimient, we can call it an experiment which I am going through now.

For the past 7 yrs I'm going thourgh an experiment. The experiment is not an ordinary one. Usually we take traditional forms and use in modern production. That was an exercise done here. But this is a reverse one. When I went for a survey I came across a kind of art form traditional form presented in a temple, performed once a year in front of a deity.

When I went for a kind of research work, they had played a good theme, very revolutionary theme. An oppressed caste bhakka?? Is giving moksha to a bhramin. That was a theme!

But after this, my survey is over, one of the persons came and asked me. Sir you are a theatre person, this is a traditional form done by Sevadasis, so, they asked me, can you do something for this. You say you are a modern theatre man, can you do something for this dying thing.

Fortunately anita rassam ??? helped me. As a sponsor. So now, I am trying to reconstruct this thing, reconstruction of a traditional form. Now they are an audience! In modern production we find there is no audience. But here in temples there is plenty of audience to see a play, but there is no play for them, no good presentation for them. So I have been asked to take this challenge, this is the 8th year I am working on this...because using some device from traditional and use in modern is easy. But find out a proper theatre element, devices to a dead traditional theatre is very difficult, I cannot direct there. I can direct a modern play, but I can not be director a traditional form. I can only evolve a kind of the form through all the traditional people there. Unfortunately the people available are completely out of touch with the thing, and some two ladies they are 80 and they are also gone, nothing there, again the contruction?? Problem again there... so I have to every year, even now this year, collecting something and putting there. Sir, people say this, can you see this, can you check this, he slowly giving one thing, and it is evolved there, added there..

I'm happy! Some of the old men there said "good, it looks something which I had seen in my younger days."

So I want to give some kind of examples my life.. in tamil nadu.. I can say one thing.. in one play.. Mutthaswamy's play... a man on the chair.. People said you can't present this on stage... then I took this to the village, but when I taken to the village, after the play they immediately said you are ridiculing politicians and the voting system. So... an experiment is an earnestness, an experiment is a challenge, an experiment is an everlasting one, and an experiment is a collection of disappointments, so let us meet disappointments, let us make disappointments, let us not lose the earnestness and the courage, I hope we'll gather together and conduct experiments, extra vision I do not want to present anything... some interaction can be happen.