

SUSHAMA DESHPANDE

When I started the play I started with this conviction that I am doing theatre journalism because I wanted to tell about Jotiba and Savitri to the masses in rural area. Before I started my first performance it was very clear to me that I wanted to do it in rural area, the reason behind it being, the illiterate people do not read much and if you don't reach up to them through other media, they do not understand what was going on... they do not know about Jotiba and Savitri. So I started this play, and after the first seventyfive performances I came to know that I was unable to reach them The reason being I was going, I was performing but they were unable to talk to me and I was unable to communicate properly. So after seventy to sevetyfive performances I decided to talk to them before the performance. So I started sitting with them and certain questions I started asking them like do you know what I am doing and so on, and getting ready for the play: putting tikka like Savitri, sometimes I wore my saree in front of them then everything that I do in the play I do in front of them and then I would ask them "Should I start the performance"? And start the performance. I believe, as Sudhanwa said yesterday, theatre is story-telling. Sometimes in rural areas they do not understand what exactly I am doing. So that time, I tell story in between and then start my performance. At a certain place I came to know that if I did only the play and finish it, they will not understand anything and they will listen to the story. So after that I started doing interventions ; I started adking them questions like there is one sentence , (Marathi sentence about a woman's life) after that I started asking them am I right? And such interventions made them think about exactly what I was doing. So before the performance making them comfortable to listen what I am doing because at some places it so happened that before the performance they showed a film, so that a crowd should be there and after such a film it was very difficult to perform Savitri. So because of certain experiences I started talking to them before. In between interventions too. Last nineteen years I am performing Savitri and there are many experiences regarding Savitri's performances. I do this performance under a tree, in the temple, anywhere. I don't need theatre space for that. So I tell, under the tree or NCPA or anywhere. So the style is as I told you, at the end of the performance I always talk to them. At the end of the performance I always tell them that I know there is a Savitri in you, in every woman from the rural area there is a Savitri and call her, call her. She will awake in you and you will be able to do many things. And that's the thing I do while doing Savitri. In short I can tell this much about the performances(at home) At the international level when I perform at conferences, I do the same thing, I get ready and tell the story in English ,get ready while doing this and start the performance. That's the usual practice in the international conferences and like that. Basically I have a feeling that though I do theatre, I am invited by the activists from the NGOs political theatre people, there is variety for Savitri's performance. I always feel that NGO people particularly, don't know how to use the play. Because after I perform, whatever we discuss they get emotionally provoked and after that you need to take it in the work but ... I have some difficulties to understand and I have always asked the NGO cadre but sometimes they agree sometimes not. Social activist people they are using theatre properly and political people they wanted to use this play to show that yes, we believe in Jotiba and Savitri. That's the only idea. They wanted to show to the people that Yes we believe in Jotiba and Savitri. We are for Jotiba and Savitri and so we are organizing this play. You all can understand the interest of the theatre people. Theatre people wanted to understand how exactly the play is and on; all those things. So this type of thing I do with Savitri's play and if you have some questions I can talk about it in detail. Another play which I do is about a Tamasha woman, based on my extensive

research on Tamasha women. I could stay with them, could spend a lot of time with them and after that I wrote a script about when in the community they have their community rules; so when she starts doing tamasha, she is not allowed to marry. Her business is flirting. So naturally, she flirts all the time and particularly while her work is going on, she will earn out of it. She has relationships, has children, and so when I was being with those women, I could see the ...if we want to understand empowerment of women we should meet these women. And so when I started this performance ... that was... expecting again... that was the wrong thing to do, that the feminist groups will use the performance particularly for the work. But sorry to say that no feminist group came forward to use this performance. I performed for the theatre and gave many performances for the theatre, but now I can say it is a theatre performance more than anything else. ...particularly Tamasha performance.. It is interesting to perform and I enjoy whenever I get an invitation to perform I do, and I do Savitri. The third play which I am going to talk about is one just I have directed 'My Mothe the Gharwali' is a play about prostitutes and their children. Particularly the prostitutes wanted to tell the mainstream audience that we are like this, that we are human beings and look at us as human beings. So the very interesting portion they wanted to do was theatre in the proscenium. They don't want to do it in a gully or don't want to go for the forum. It was very clear to them that they wanted to do the proscenium theatre and they did two shows in Rang Shankara and four shows in Prithvi We got overwhelming response from the audience After each show there was a discussion, dialogue with the artists and very good response we had but I feel I haven't seen this experience from a distance yet. Just on 18th & 19th we had shows in Prithvi and I came here to Heggoddu. But I can say this much that whoever acting in the play, they have changed a little bit after these performances. like one boy who is known as a criminal in that area and who is full of anger and who would not talk to anybody before, started singing filmi songs and laughing too much. So these types of changes after going through the process but I think I need to take much time before I can talk about this experience because just we have finished the work. These are the three plays I wanted to talk about. Now many girls have started doing Savitri. From my first performance, I used to say that anyone can do this anywhere, and need not ask permission, without having to pay me anything because Savitri is not my property. It should be everybody's. and after ten years of my performances women have started doing Savitri a lot and here is Aditi sitting in the room and she wanted to do it in Hindi or Gujarati. Because different eight languages scripts are available..... and many languages ... and sometimes I feel I must slow down... but young girls from the rural area are doing it. And now when I meet young girls who had seen my performance many years ago and are young mothers now, their responses is very interesting. I think Savitri gives me my life my voice, everything, and it is very difficult to live without Savitri. So sometimes in between I was thinking of closing the performances because many other girls are doing, and then Prithvi invited me for a performance and Sanjana said do not leave this so I do a few performances in a year and whenever I get an invitation particularly for the young girls, I just go and perform there. Now if there are any questions, I would talk more, and now I want to stop within my limit. Thank You.