

Vivek Shanbag:

.....and grasp it as an individual and as a community. This morning Sainath spoke, gave a list of ten points and he spoke about rise of corporate power and market fundamentalism. One can also see it as a rise of corporate fundamentalism and market power, but I think it is, these are quite important points. Two most important points which have a direct impact, have had a direct impact on the way we see things and the way we engage ourselves with activities like theatre, literature, etc. Take this example, I don't know how many of you know, many of the multinationals that operate in India today, they have a governance structure which includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka. They see it as one entity and there is one CEO for it. And what does it really mean? Sainath talked about the rise of corporate power and these companies operate and they behave as if there are no political boundaries. And it is quite common and it is not known outside corporate circles, but it is really what is happening and change coming in a big way in last few years. In fact a more striking example that I came across recently is where Middle East is seen as one entity and there is one Chief Operating Officer for Arabia as well as Israel, which even in their dreams these people would not like to sit together nor would like to associate themselves with, in any manner. In fact if you travel to Middle East, any of the Middle East countries or if you travel to Israel, you will not be able to get a visa to any of the Middle East countries. But these corporate houses behave as if there are no corporate boundaries and that is how the emerging structure is. So what is, what do we do about it? What is it for us? Why are they doing it? If you really look at it, it is the market forces and they are really trying to consolidate markets. And what does it mean. It really means that they want to see the markets, they want to see the population as a single entity. And for them to reach that goal the biggest hurdle is really diversity. They want to standardise and get there. And the biggest hurdle is diversity. Diversity of all sorts, diversity of language, diversity of culture, diversity of ways of life, habits and what not. So actually it really means that if you reduce the diversity then it reduces the cost and increases the profit. So in the eyes of all these people the diversity is a very, very big cost. And I think it is very important to understand this in current context and especially when today Akshara spoke about television and he also said that there is only one kind of Kannada being used. We are fortunate that at least Kannada is being used, but if there was an opportunity they would probably switch to English. I won't go into the details of it, but I would like you to really note this - the cost of diversity. In fact in some parts of the world, like for e.g. Middle East, many of the companies find that they, that Friday is a holiday in the Middle East and they find it extremely irritating that these people don't have their weekends on Saturdays and Sundays instead they have on Fridays. And there are all sorts of things being done to change it and what does a weekend mean? Weekend means there is a certain type of sale happens and this and that. So all types of investment and efforts are being made to change the habit, so that people buy on Saturdays and Sundays instead of Fridays. So that more discounts are offered on Saturdays and Sundays. And it has its own advantages for companies. I won't go into the details of that. The point I am trying to make is that there is so much effort being made and so much of, so many millions are being spent in killing diversity, in bringing a kind of standardisation while there is no organised effort or almost nothing is spent in terms of energy, time and focus on sustaining this, which is in my view is absolutely vital and important for theatre, literature, or any such activity.

The second point I would like to make is on ways of engagement and the relationship that the people have or the changing relationship of, changing relationship with work. In the morning Sainath talked about the number of workers being reduced in Telco and in Tesco and lot of examples that he gave, which is really true. But there is another point which I think one must also see, is that the wages of all these people who have become half in number have gone up significantly in last ten-fifteen years. And also at the same time, I am sure all of you have noticed this, that there is the unions have become almost toothless. And workers unions and the reason for that is all these years they have been the only way through which they fought the cause of the workers is for wages. And in the changed scenario the paying more to the worker is not an issue and as a result there is absolutely no cause for the union. I mean I am trying to bring a point, but there is no really major cause for them to fight and then it has become almost toothless. So we never hear about any activities by unions all those things which used to be order of the day a few years ago. And what does it really mean? It means that, so what is really happening? The relationship which was there with an employer has been reduced to a contract. And for e.g. in except for few government jobs, there is no pension in any of the companies today and it means that it is really telling an employee that the relationship is only temporary and there is nothing permanent about it. And everything is converted into current money and in current terms. That is the reason why the wages have gone up, which is something which is changed, which has not happened overnight but has happened over last eight ten years. And it means that everyday is a new day and every week is a new week and it has changed the mindset and what was there and the impact of that is not only in these few millions who are working in the industry or in any of the organised sector. But it has a very significant impact on the way they engage. And it is very short term and it is here and now and nothing beyond. And if you see, we see that all over the place and whether it is advertisement, whether it is TV serial or whether it is you know ability of the people to engage themselves on anything longer, everywhere we see the impact of this and someone was talking in the morning about one day cricket and it has become twenty-twenty and soon it will become one over. So these are the kinds of things. And what does it mean in terms of you know all these changing things on engagement. It means that what is really encouraged in all this is a passive engagement as against the active engagement. So you are passively involved in any of these things, whether it is TV or anything and it is very much encouraged because any active engagement requires a lot of effort and the impression that is given is there is no time for anything. And the result of that is seen in the way we engage in whether it is literature or theatre or any other form. And so these are two important points, two important developments that I feel have happened in the last one decade that has an impact on the way we perceive, the way we engage with the new reality.

I will just make two points which is how has this been really tackled in some parts of the world. I will just give one example of the way people in Israel handled some of the technological developments. For e.g. about eight years ago when Microsoft were trying to launch their product into Israel they said that it is they will allow it only if it is Hebrew. It went on for some time and then if you see all the Microsoft products and most of the software products are also available in Hebrew which is a really in terms of numbers is a very small number, and the market is also very small, but the point I am making is that the consolidation of the market, the numbers and the forces that worked and put everything behind that is something which is remarkable and I think there is something that we need to learn from that. For e.g. we have so many languages in India which are much more in number than Hebrew, whether it is Hindi,

Tamil or Kannada or anything. But I don't find any Microsoft products releases in any of these languages. I can go on and on, maybe I can give more examples and talk about it in question answer session. Thanks for giving me this opportunity. Thank you very much.