

Sanjna Kapoor
Introduction

Thank you very very much, you have come all the way to this place. Some of you... Do you have the over view of why this all began, you know why we are here and you get to know a little more about why we are here through what Akshara and Sudhanva will say, but I just want to give you the beginnings of how the India Theatre Forum came to be. Some of you may be familiar with it, some of you have been in other forums.

It started about two and a half three, four or five years ago at Prithvi Theatre. I am Sanjana, nobody introduced me, but its okay. At Prithvi theatre where I work we were to celebrate our 25th anniversary at, it is a very loud speaker, ..and you should, and it was a time of, actually it was a strange time, a time of looking back and contemplation and not really a time of drumming of, beating of drums and celebration, it was the time of pause to take stock, and the one, the greatest factor that hit me personally and the group in the face was that even though Prithvi was situated in a very fortunate position, being in Mumbai city, being a place where everyone wants to come and perform in, yet we were incredibly isolated. We didn't feel we were part of a community. We had no idea about what was really going on in the rest of the country and we were getting really really really tired. And we felt that we needed some form of resuscitation. To tell you the truth it was purely selfish. One set out to see if there were other people who felt the same and who felt a need to connect and to share experiences, to share survival, instincts and ways and to try and see if somehow we can feed off each others energy and work towards strengthening ourselves, strengthening our own impulses and our own inspirations and so gradually through a series of interactions and meetings with people, some of who are here, we came up with an idea of trying to put together a theatre forum, initially it was called the sort of Policy forum because we need to change something, there is a great big lacuna and we don't know what it is and surely the policy plays a role in this and I think policy will a part of what we wish to engage in but its not the be all and end all in itself, so a group of us together, its no longer Prithvi, now thank fully, we did realize that now there is many people in India who felt the same and felt that they needed this exchange this connection, this sharing and through that was formed the India Theatre forum and it is still nascent, it's a baby. What is it? I think it's a network, I think it's a way of connecting to each other. The theatre practitioners, as well as other people who care about theatre, I think it is about people who really care about theatre, not only about our own work, surely our own work matters but it's the bigger picture as well, its about how theatre can actually be nurtured and how we can move from surviving to thriving, how we can actually claim our space in society today and say we do matter.

There was another reason, perhaps a reason that didn't quite articulate to myself even, but the more I think about it and this forum made me realize it just yesterday that, perhaps there was another reason that made me feel you know speaking in the train with Daxin that this is really critical, it is necessary for me personally that in the last say 7, 8 10 years there has been a creeping in of fear in ones' life and its ridiculous to live in a state of fear and I am living in Bombay city and I am the most fortunate of people and yet one is living ina situation of fear living in Prithvi theatre and why should that be and how can we tolerate it? And perhaps we just need to find ways of just connecting to each other not necessarily in direct ways but in

very indirect ways we can energize each other we can give each other ideas as to how to broach these issues, these subjects which are not always tangible, not always subjects that we can have academic debates about but there are things that happen in a fleeting conversation over Chai and its these meetings that are really essential, what I personally feel. So how do we go about breathing life into this network. There's constantly going to be a change a, new ways are constantly going to be found, some of the ways are meetings like this, this is the biggest meeting we've ever had, we did come to Ninasam before and had a meeting in Chennai before. Usually the way this forum works is that a group of us meet and we throw up ideas and concerns, some of us present papers or we throw up a debate and we go away with some concrete ideas and themes, areas of engagement. The meeting is never an end in itself, it never will be, this meeting is not an end in itself, it may end in a book it may end in a collection of essays but it will be a lot more, it needs to be a lot more. What does it need to be, for one thing it needs to be an understanding that each one of us bears a responsibility that you are not part of a team that's going to take care of it all for you. If you believe in what we are doing and you believe its important you are going to have to be an active member, not have to be you should be an active member which means that in whatever way you can engage in disseminating information or take forward a thought you need to be able to do it, within that there is a structure, we have a core team, that core team may also change over time its quite fluid. Now its pulled together by six of us who, no, eight of us, no nine of us who feel we have the ability to give time to the functioning of this work apart from our regular work and sometimes its really really troublesome, we are all in this as individuals not as organizations and I would advise hat we are not in the same organization, Sameera is in it, which is great but I'd say that Prithvi work needs attention and she is doing forum work and I have to deep breathe five times and not get upset but we are here as individuals and we have decided that we will give time for this work, it hard work, its seriously hard work, we have worked really hard as a team to put this together. I just want to quickly tell you who the team is right now, we have Akshara, who is our host, one of the members, we have Sudhanva from Delhi, where are you, jump up and down, we have Sameera, we have Praveen from Chennai and we have me and we have some body who does not formally know that she is a core team member but now she is, Moloysree by the virtue of, by sheer chance she did so much work for this forum that now she is a core team member, now she is, you know that right?, that she is laughing is acceptance and of course we have Bandhu and Saurabh who you have also met, Bandhu and Saurabh bear a lot of responsibility in that they have to do a lot of the dirty work but they are also part of the pulling together of ideas, thinking and how to plan things, they are not just the back end.

The way we work is that we throw up ideas, for instance this forum was really Sudhanva's idea, way back in the first meeting in 2006 he felt very strongly that actually, when is the drama seminar? we missed it? 57, was it last year? We were supposed to do this... (Sudhanva adds that we have missed it by 2 years)Oh God two years, He thought 50 years after the drama seminar, 60 years? 50 years of the drama seminar, we should have another drama seminar so that's where this idea was born from and we had several meetings and engagements with various people to throw up idea and structures and then we finally came up with this, it happened, sort of germinated its way into being. There was one particular forum on micro finance which happened in Chennai, lot of people were wondering why e were doing this particular forum, it was an idea that I threw up simply because I met a banker who said that why cant you take a loan from microfinance and I thought it was possible for some traditional

performing arts, not necessary with urban theatre. I still have to do a lot of work in that direction, that's an unfinished programme, so there are these ideas to working towards a children's forum, working towards a forum which looks at administration and management, theatre administration and management, the idea of working with Siddharth's organization and trying to revoke the dramatic performing act if we are all active and if we feel its important enough. So the way that this forum will work will be through a series of engagements, we will also do surveys, we also just want to travel around and see work and meet theatre groups, the trip to Patna, the trip to Ninasam, to hear survival stories, to hear how people? How people really do theatre, to understand how it works. Now the most important thing is dissemination of course, that is critical and it would be disastrous if we didn't do that. You will come to know in the course of 4 days how we plant o work our website which should be up soon. We will be working through a series of publications, working with journals that already exist and really its up to you, there are lot of journals I found out in Patna in Bihar, journals being created by small theatre groups. We need to create a link with them to just see if we could just put a little information of what's going on. Why is it in the 1970's people in Jodhpur knew what was going on in Orissa, in Kerala, today we have no idea. This is the reality we live in today but if we don't actively engage in trying to connect we are going to be drowned out and we wont matter, so unless we really don't make an effort to matter, we may not is my feeling. This is all being made possible, thanks to not only the madness of the core team but also to the funding of Sir Ratan Tata Trust. So what is the situation is that we have funding for 3 years after which we have to find ways and means to keep this network alive and we have to really contemplate on this seriously, we cant survive on funding agencies for ever. But the way the structure is that even if there was a meeting, say there was a smaller meeting in Ninasam, meeting in Chennai, even the core group members will travel there on our own money and its only when we are there that we will be taken care of by the forum and that is just to try and keep a system in place which means you actually have to put something out apart from just your time, you have to put something more out to make it known that you care. Of course if you are a speaker or a delegate, a speaker or a respondent or a chair or an invitee the forum would pay for you and that's just to let you know. That's the way it works. Why Ninasam? We wanted to pull everybody here, we knew by coming here, there would be many people who wouldn't come and we are delighted that we have people way from Manipur, you know, we are delighted that people have made the effort to come here. Ninasam because it is really an institution that one finds has tried to create a space in the community and that is important and I think we have a lot to take from Ninasam and a lot to give to Ninasam and it's a way of saying our Salams to Mr. Subanna and thanking Ninasam and thank you Ninasam for having us but we felt it was important that we be in an institution, a theatre institution and I hope that there are many many more institutions like these in India where we could keep having forums every year, sadly enough there aren't too many, but hopefully there will start getting more, really quick. What I really do hope is that this conversation for the next 4 days is invigorating and provoking and leaves us with a lot of ideas and a lot of energy. I know personally that in the last 2 years the work of this forum has left me huge energy, a lot of it is latent, I still have to express it, just simply in my work in Bombay but it has given me tremendous energy and may be its only my very personal greed that is pushing me on towards this and I hope to God that there are other people who feel the same and I think they must be because that's why you are all here, at least one hopes that this is why you are all here, I am sure it is. What is going to happen right now is that Sameera is going to come and tell you the nitty gritty of how some modalities and ways

things are here, then we are going to have keynote address by Akshara and sudhanva and then we are going to see measure for measure in Kannada. Thank you all very very much!