

Anmol Vellani:

“...and one is the point that what Sanjana was saying led me to think about the place from where I come. She is basically concerned with the creation of facilities for theatre, primarily, so when she realizes that something like Prithvi has worked to some extent in meeting that goal, she realizes that the possibilities are greater, so she wants to see that expanded in some way and establish ten more of them and so on to actually, you know, influence theatre in a larger way and have an impact on a larger number of groups. I think similarly when you say providing funds for theatre, you need similarly multiple perspectives of support, because everybody will come at what they do with a specific perspective and therefore I was happy with the idea that Sanjana put up in her vision which was of actually providing fellowships for people based in Bombay to go....that comes out of that reality but maybe from a reality from Kolkata there will be an impulse governing what needs to be funded, so we need these multiple place from where support is made available because it is always made available either based in a specific perspective or based on an understanding of the realities on the ground and sometimes it is all very well to have institutions at work on a national level because they will come with a certain kind of perspective but you need also funding to come from local levels because they will be more in tune to what is required at the ground level there. So you need these kinds of bodies to mushroom in different ways and they might often be informal bodies. The other thing was the point that Sanjana made about building institutions and she put it slightly differently from the way I would put it, which is that what you find generally, not universally in institutions is that one voice speaks and the others listen and respond. And what is not happening, and that is why when that one or two persons go away, the institution collapses. So what you need is to build a culture where there are multiple voices speaking. It is very common abroad for any cultural institution to have more than one artistic director. It's so uncommon in this country. We seem to not be able to tolerate multiple sources of authority within institutions and multiple voices there can actually make a difference at the policy level, and are seen to make a difference, who can actually effect change at the highest level in the institution. Unless you do that, then the person who happens to be the so called leading, when he or she goes then there are all these people who have taken ownership of the institution. And there is no reason to believe that it will collapse. So an institution must become fearlessly and reflexively dialogic within, in order to survive. Now, after yesterday, I thought we should be speaking about institutions as normalisers of violence. Because they often are. And this normalized violence is directed mostly against individuals and groups that rely on institutions for support and survival. A very simple fact: IFA says no to at least 200 requests every year, and says yes to maybe 20. The 'no' in many cases makes a significant difference to lives and prospects of the people who apply for support. Significant difference. To whom is IFA accountable for the choices it makes? Now you could say it's accountable to the public. But where is the public? To reframe Sadanand's question, 'what conditions must already exist for you to be accountable to public within your sector?' I mean the public's voice has to be channelised somehow, right? And the emergence of, say, this theatre forum, is one thing that is required even for funding bodies to become accountable to the public. Otherwise who do you speak to? Who do you dialogue with exactly? And therefore you need more of these kinds of bodies ...

(04:55).....you can engage people who are capable of providing support. Because otherwise they will remain unaccountable. And it is not necessarily their fault. It is the fault of the environment in which they function. Now (05:10).... Requests and there are many of those that we receive, people who ask for support are genuinely passionate, they genuinely believe in what they do, or what they want to do, or what they aspire to doing. Why should they not, faced with a reject letter, feel wrong, devalued, misunderstood? It's natural. Institutions can support theatre in many different ways. We talked about providing facilities, to cash awards, to providing excess to knowledge, to exercising influence and so on. For those in the theatre who need or desire such support, these institutions are potential saviors or potential victims, ahhh....potential villains, sorry! Sanjana talked about, she said that her worst job was programming the space. She hated doing that. Now why does she hate doing that? She hates doing that because she has to take decisions that affect other people. Her decisions...some people will be advantaged and some people disadvantaged. It's not a good situation to be in. that's why I have bags under my eyes! Now, in becoming either potential villains, or potential saviors, you become a villain by a factor of 20 over being a savior because you say 'no' so many more times and I presume around 20 times than you say 'yes'. Whatever kind of support you are providing. Cash support, facility support, you name it. You are always going to be in that position. Now organized philanthropy, as against spontaneous acts of charity has sometimes been described as coercive. And so the violence comes in. it's coercive and its described this way for good reasons. Whether in theatre or in any other field, it determines what will be supported, how it will be supported, and why it will be supported. You might be lucky and turn out to be just the individual or the group that foundation is looking for. But in most cases you will end up playing an elaborate cat-and-mouse game with that philanthropic organization and make a series of adjustments and compromises to the proposals and plans you wanted support for. And the more desperation you are in, the more likely you are to make that compromise. And in so far as the economy around theatre cant even be described as a subsistent economy, they are people who are in desperate situation they are more likely to make compromises, faced with this power in front of it. In the worst case scenario, you will end up being what's called a donor driven and lose all sense of your purpose. It gets worse if the supporting agency, does not work primarily or exclusively for arts. Influences in any other sector, even if they choose to support theatre, give priority to their own perspectives and interests to that of theatre. Think about any sector outside the arts that supports the arts. Think of it. If it's the development sector the funding is available for social message theatre, but very little else. Because enough of thinking about theatre from the perspective of theatre, they are thinking of theatre from the perspective of development. If it's the corporate sector, they will theatre because they want to build brands, festivals, events and you have to throw in a mix of stardom and celebrity otherwise you wont get support. Government, rather than talk generally, go back to what Sanjana said why won't the government of Maharashtra support Prithvi theatre? Because it doesn't support enough Marathi theatre. Now why? Because, it's not thinking about, the government of Maharashtra is not thinking about the realities on the ground in Bombay, the kind of city it is, but its thinking about, its coming at support for theatre from a particular political perspective. Even if the influences of society chose to support the arts with, say, perspectives drawn from the arts, theatre would perhaps be the last things they would

consider supporting, among the arts. Theatre is not establishment. It's not classical in the sense of which we are talking about theatre. It's not safe. It's too challenging. It's too defiant. Too iconoclastic. Too self directing. Too subversive. There are no shortages of reasons giving attention to any art form other than theatre. So let us not fool ourselves. Institutions that adequately and properly support theatre through funding or in all the forms that we can imagine, and in ways that the theatre community might respect or might applaud, will not emerge in the lifetime of anyone present in this room. As I have been talking about institutions my guess is that you all have been picturing certain types of institutions. Formal, legally instituted entities, whether promoted by the state or promoted by agencies independent of the state. It's these kinds of bodies that have clear codes of conduct which establish frameworks within which they function and which serve them as weapons of violence. But these are not the only kinds of institutions that we can think about. An institution we all know comes into existence, when an idea settles down and is pursued with reasonable direction, systematically. In this sense this theatre forum is an institution. And I think this is the kinds of institutions you actually need more of if you are going to get support for theatre, because as I said its not actually going to come from anywhere else in the ways that you would desire or want. It is an institution moreover as the six people sitting here yesterday said that, as Sanjana said, so that the practice of theatre people will be articulated by themselves and by others. Samira said that the dream is to build an active theatre community that support each other and share space. That's exactly what I mean. What the theatre forum does is supporting theatre in a certain way, deepening discourse, bringing the theatre community together to address vital and issues of shared concern. And I think that what I want to argue is that we need more institutions of this type which rely on the energies and motivations and participation of individuals involved in theatre at all levels and stages. And that's the kind of development we really need. As we have discussed, they could be institutions doing a variety of things, they could be strengthening discourse, they could be generating audiences for theatre, and they could be improving communication between the theatre community and other sectors, whatever. What is important is that these are institutions in which the people from theatre themselves mutually and jointly advocate support and advocate their own interests and concerns. In other words I believe that only theatre people can possibly alter the conditions in which they subsist. You can't really expect anyone else to have the motivation, to have the understanding, necessary understanding of what theatre needs and demands. I am nearly finished....I think you should all remember that though you talk about impoverishment of resources in theatre, all of you, if you have thought about it, have lots of resources. They are resources of different kinds. In fact, you think of the theatre forum, what is it doing? It's bringing different kinds of resources in different institutions together. Right? The resources of Prithvi are very different from the resources at Ninasam to the other people who are the moment at the core of this particular initiative.(14: 40)....allow these resources to come together in a effective and optimal way which will enable you to build institutions of and by the theatre. Now you might say, and I am closing now, isn't this forum relying on outside support? It is, at the moment. I don't think it needs to do so endlessly, but it is at the moment. But remember what has changed, by the fact that you have this forum, is terms in which you negotiate with the people who have money. It is no longer the case that somebody is coming to a foundation and saying "I have this project and it will help me

advance my artistic practice.” Or you know, “I have this project and I will support theatre in this way through this project.” Because one of the reasons why foundations feel uneasy is that it knows that in any sector in which it works, it’s a house divided. Whatever you do, somebody is going to criticize you. Right? Nobody shares the same perspective. All the people here, they don’t have the same perspectives in theatre. So anything that any foundation does will be criticized by someone or the other so, it certainly feels less anxious when there are people who come together and say we want to support theatre in a certain way and we are willing to overcome whatever ideological differences in poetics and aesthetics in order to make that happen. That means that in a sense you are saying that give it to us to decide what must be done for the theatre. Right? And another reason why a foundation feels better about that is because certainly they feel they are able to address the sector with a larger canvas. I think that is the best relationship you can have with a foundation. But that means that you guys have to do a certain amount of work to actually make the terms of negotiation actually change. Thank you.”