

Sanjna Kapoor:

"This is a paper by 'not the right Kapoor'. Anuradha Kapoor was supposed to be here. But I am not at all used to this, so I am going to read. I will then go into 'not reading' at a certain point, I presume. What I propose to do is share my very personal experiences on what sort of theatre institution. I envisage and I am going to look really at Mumbai, as an example because then it gives concrete frameworks within which one can actually dream. So it's really my own desire, experiences and needs and wishes and hopes of what I hope will provoke an interesting conversation and I do not claim to have any answers what I am going to show you in a little which is a dream idea but that comes from Lacunas that I feel exist in the field of theatre institutions especially in Bombay. But before I go into that dream idea, I'd like to quickly outline the forces that have outlined our activity and work at Prithvi, over the last 30 years. I think, we were clearly a tiny little institute that was set up to nurture theatre groups, artistically and financially. So there was clearly that binary function. So how does one do that? By giving them professional facilities! By availing groups for long periods of time as opposed to the 4 hour session, that is mostly the practice. To expose groups to other work from across the country and across the world, and to subsidize the rental system, to avail To always consciously look at their financial situation and existence and stability. There was we work at Prithvi, our facilities, technical facilities are free that is they are included in the rental system. I am looking clearly at Bombay urban scenario, this is miles away from Ninasam scenario, but there may be some overlaps that could take place. The other focus would be to create a theatre audience. There is no separation of the two. This is as critical and as important. Audiences are something that miss out a lot when we talk about theatre and it's really the most important part. Therefore systems have outreached, dissemination pulling in an audience, as well as once they come, creating a comfortable space for them to feel like they belong. To feel that they can stay and that they are quite welcome. It is, yeah, ironical that Prithvi doesn't have a gate, there is no gate to Prithvi theatre, to main building, yes, but not to the complex and I don't know if that was something consciously thought of or happened to be but it is an important aspect of the way we work. There is also a slightly less visible factor, in the way we function. And maybe that is something one has come to realize, quite unconsciously but even though Prithvi has become a dreadful thing called a 'brand'. We can't hide away from the fact that that is what we have become. However, that is for the perception of a lot of the corporate world and we should possibly try and use it to the best of our....., you know, to sustain us in many ways, but it is a tricky gamble and the one thing that being in the situation of being pushed into becoming a brand, it makes us even more conscious to look at what we do and how we work. I think the one way we do work is to try and keep our doors open to other people's ideas and to try and breathe life into other people's ideas and concepts and not necessarily claim ownership of them. We are a catalytic, germinating foundation we hope, and we are not necessarily something that wants to say this is who we are all the time. And I think those are the 3 areas where you look at, the groups, the audience and the basic element of wanting to be invisible somewhere. But to be a very solid pushing force is very important to an institution, at least ours. So, what sort of institution, I envisage that could programme and nurture regular activity. It is very critical to nurture regular activity. And we could start by looking at some of the crazy little things I threw together. The thing that actually prompted me to do this was a few months ago I was completely and absolutely and totally frustrated because I had to allocate dates at Prithvi and I hate that job. It's the

most awful job because its...the responsibility is enormous to keep alive and sustain 40 odd groups in Bombay, whose work does not necessarily one like but one has to do it because one knows the reality of the city. There is no other institution that shares the responsibility. Is this were to come into being, Prithvi would be freed of this dreaded responsibility of keeping these groups alive and then perhaps we would move onto the more exciting and challenging area of programming creatively and really developing an audience in many dynamic ways, collaborating with performing groups, producing our own plays, creating seasons of theatre. There's a whole amount of work we could do but we can't. And this is a debate we have had within ourselves, with other groups in Bombay. Dubey believes that we should go on and be our own dictatorship cell which is, we are, but we have to still look at the reality of being able to sustain the groups, I mean, otherwise they just dwindle and die. Just to go very very quickly over what we are. This is the tiny plot, everybody may not know what Prithvi theatre is, we are a small building, we are not a group, we have an auditorium, it was built 30 years ago, we have very hard working actors, directors, very very hard. It's really tiny, its 200 seats. We usually love to have groups come in at the crack of dawn and work all right through the day. We try to make it as comfortable as possible so groups feel this is their home as well. It's built on a very tiny plot of land and there are tremendous constraints and there are a lot of problems with this theatre. It is not the most ideal theatre space, however it is really quite beautiful and I think that has been the merging of an actress and an architect who was open to exploring and creating a performance space, critically important for performers and audience and of course they are very important to us. These are the people who sustain our activity, without them we would not survive. And this is the café and it is essential that people stay and have an adda and I can't believe there can be theatres in Delhi that don't have this, some of them do, but Kamani auditorium doesn't and I just find it shocking, that in NCPA is I sit on a step I am asked to move. For us, it is essential that people create an adda. It is critical to anything. We have an adda here. It is the most important thing that you have an adda. So, yes, now very quickly to give a reality of how we work. Since funding is, I am not going to go into funding in great detail, we get money of course from the rent, but there is this access money that we really require, this is as of now. This is today's status. And, we have been lucky to be able to in the last 21 years, to get this access money covered by sponsors. We never had government grants; governments don't have a scheme to support buildings like ours. The central government, the state government doesn't even want to look at us, almost, cause we don't deal with Marathi theatre so much. But this is what we need, what we have made, and this is what we do. We have 400 shows a year that I am not necessarily proud of. I don't say that this is a great thing to tommorow about. As I said, if we had more centres like this across the city we could have a 100 to 200 shows a year and then we could push to quality. At the moment we are not in a position to do that. And it's really sad. So if we were to have 10 Prithvi theatres in Bombay, and it doesn't have to have our brand on it. It doesn't have to be managed by us, good god, no! It would be wonderful if it would be possible to breathe life into 10 more centres or 9 more centres similar to this in the city of Bombay. A lot of these spaces already exist, a lot of auditoriums that are small and intimate and could house activity like us already exist. It's just a question of that management thinking differently and finding ways of sustaining their activity and I believe there are ways. So, if that were the case this would roughly be, this is all very roughly thrown together, but the kind of economics beyond the income that they would generate through rent and the kind of activity they could generate through the year. Of course, this didn't happen overnight, I am not really sure when we hit this dreaded 400 shows mark, but it didn't happen in the

beginning. When we started 30 years ago, we had to firstly go out and convince theatrewallahs to come and perform and they thought this was a horrendous stage without curtains and "where could you put your boxset" and it was just hideous. And then to convince the audiences to come and in those days people thought nobody would come to Juhu at all. But now people come to Juhu because they live around Juhu. What if we had children's centres? You know there's a plot of land in Bombay which is supposed to be dedicated completely and totally to children's theatre and it's near Balbhavan on Churney Road, Marine Drive. Jawaharlal Nehru laid the stone. It's blank and empty. If we were to have children's theatre that would do only children's theatre and that had workshops only for children, I think it would be phenomenal and you have so many schools, you have an audience. It is for me, in my mind, the most economical form of theatre. It is complexly self sustaining. It is usually for profit making. Roughly (pause) these are all dummy costs, these are not building costs. These are once you are up and functional, you have to conceive up a building and a staff system which is hugely ??????(timestamp: 17:00). We are not going to create an NCPA; with I don't know how many people employed. Prithvi has 9 people employed in it, including our cleaner and watchman. So you have to think of the barest minimal and hope to god that you can sustain that. Open air spaces, why is it that we don't have regular open air spaces. Delhi does, but it is only some sort of fancy winter thing that happens only in fancy parts of Delhi. Am I correct? So, you will have lovely music in the park at Nehru Park and the person who organizes it claimed that people do come from ??????, so maybe I am wrong but I really don't understand why we can create public spaces, performance spaces across the city of Bombay in parks or beaches or courtyards or.....there are not many open spaces across the city of Bombay but you don't need much space for theatre, you can squeeze yourselves into tiny spaces. For the last nine years we have been performing in Herman circle garden and actually it's been a failure. The idea of us performing there and presenting, performing as in we present groups to perform at Herman circle garden. It's the only free thing we do. We ticket everything else, but the idea was to develop an alternate performance space and to broaden our audience base. The audience is really quite interesting. The hugely wide range of people who come to see plays there. Its run on a terribly small budget. Word of mouth is enormous and that's the way we want it. We want to create habits. It's essential, I believe that any kind of programming creates habits that people know. Ok! First weekend of every month, there is a show Herman circle garden. But we failed to create an alternate space for other groups to go and also use. Primarily, I believe, because the licensing costs are 7000/- per show for an open air show. Not all of this is receipted and all of this is the battle we have to fight. This is the fight that exists for open air shows all over Mumbai. There is no window system. It is a nightmare. We are the only fools who find the money to do it. But if the city of Bombay, state of Maharashtra, the corporate and the theatre community come together and say, Ok, we need this. You know there's this wonderful, all this great vision 2020 about Mumbai city being the greatest international world class city. Nobody is thinking of culture. It really doesn't matter., surely that is something that happens anyway. It doesn't happen anyway! You have to have spaces for that to happen. We all know that. And if we don't put just a little bit of thought, money and space aside for engagement like this, I believe Bombay's going to become a place where every second person has a gun in their hand. I have seen it myself, outside Prithvi theatre . That was the day I decided that this was not the city I really want to live in. now, how does one really push for quality work. And surely, training is one thing, but what about people who are already trained and who are working in the field of theatre or theatre and film. There is not any space where we can go and hone our skills or

polish our instrument. And we are one of the few creative creatures in India who specially believe we need none of this, we can learn our lines and you know, walk on stage and we are god's gift and its ironical, we come from a tradition of classical arts where royal is part of what you do. And the theatre fraternity doesn't believe this is necessary. I believe it is! And I believe it is from (I was an actress once) those years when I was an actress and there weak no space for this and I believe that this is something that is absolutely essential especially in the city of Bombay. It is not a course, not a two year course, a three year course, it is short workshops done by the very finest conductors, practitioners and you will have mid career people and highly experienced people from various aspects of theatre practice, not only acting, technical, directing come together for short periods of time and work and this is very very do-able. So that sort of one of the groups doing such a thing at Prithvi. Of course the laboratory, I mean Sada(menon) said that clearly any theatre created in America for instance has at least two or three laboratory spaces. If we were to have one, I would consider it to be slightly outside Bombay because I think just the madness of Bombay is not a good idea. But a retreat and we all know that everybody is crying out loud for a space like this and to have a space where one can go and just work with a group of people and not result oriented, not create a great production out of it but do some really amazing work. I think that's critical. Very bad photography, it was 2 30 in the morning when I found that. I believe that there's another thing that, obviously there are bits and pieces of what's that has happened, but from what I understood, is that the Charles Wallace Award is one of the most exciting awards I have been familiar with wherein you design your own programme. You design exactly what you want to do. And they allow you to do it. And in India, if we look at India, I think I know, Kumud, an actor you saw yesterday wants to go and work with Ratan Thiyam for three months and Ratan Thiyam has said come. He can't, he has a rent to pay in Bombay city and he just got married. How on earth could he go? But why not? Why can't we put our resources, our energies together to enable young people to travel across the country to see each other's work, to go and appreciate or travel and watch festivals, even internationally. Why is it international organizations that have to do this, why can't we do this? This, have I put figures to this? No. I can't put figures to this. It is very much more expensive. This is a huge project which I...well Samira came back from Brazil and this was something that started 50 years ago called "ceski". And the way these projects were run, they were community art projects, community centres actually not only arts, arts and sports and funding was....a little CESS was put on business houses, some tiny percentage and that funding went directly into funding these centres and there are in communities across brazil and they still exist and they are usually old mills or factories, but they also have state of the art centres that have been setup and they sustain themselves. There is a tiny membership, it's very affordable and they have the finest art gallery exhibitions, ??????? Exhibitions that travel or exhibitions that are there. They have swimming pools and sports facilities which are superb but they also have libraries, they have centres for kids, they have, of course, this is really interesting, these open spaces, not 'multipurpose' spaces. That hideous word. That means nothing. That should also be annihilated. These great multipurpose theatres that we create that are good for nothing. An open space like this which is possibly usable for anything except from that, you can see here, there's just some kind of meeting or workshop going on her, gallery, spaces used in the architectural crevices that are created and the kind of performance that would happen in spaces like this and you will have multiply performing spaces, a proscenium, a tiny intimate space, an open air space. Recently I was in Sholapur and a minister told me with great pride that he was going to inaugurate the...., he was going to

lay foundation stone for a new theatre and it was going to be like Prithvi, it was small and intimate and he was really proud of it and I said "so, how is it going to be funded? How are you going to work the economics out?" he said "oh! Completely free!" Nobody pays any rent and I said what about the audiences, he said "oh! Free!" and I said why? Why should the audience not pay? This is in Maharashtra. They are used to paying and he said noon.....there's a beautiful space outside the theatre...its like a slight hillside and its absolutely wonderful and so my imagination was going wild thinking "oh wow" this is so interesting and he said that's going to be a marriage hall! That is going to fund the theatre activity. yeah! So how does one begin to talk to somebody? But we have to begin to talk to the minister, I have to go back to him and say, hey why can't we look at other sustainable ways? I don't know the answers but let's look at them and let's not keep your marriage hall here and lets use that space for open air performances music or there's so many things that one could do. So if we had this community art centres, the kind of activity that could happen there, I mean imagine, this is really a foolish naive dream! But just imagine that one of the mills in Bombay were to become this we could have our own art mall, would call it our art art mall and people will really throng to it. So, if Bombay had this, I asked Mohit some months ago, in Pune, that how many shows would you ideally like to do in Pune in a year? A dream! He paused for a moment, not very long, he said quickly actually, and he said 75. And I asked whether Pune had an audience to sustain 75 performances of Alaska and he said yes and I said where are the spaces? That aren't any! So I am in a bit of a shock when I read that the central government scheme and I see that they give salary grants to theatre groups. Where are these groups going to perform? Where do they perform? I don't get it! I just don't get the complete blindness. Sainath talked about the farmers, the budget. Nobody (it is interesting that I thought of it and then I read this article) that said in the article as well, nobody touched upon the income of the farmers. How do they generate an income? Who will stop their suicides? And the policies that are affecting that? We have to generate an income. How are we going to sustain ourselves and whatever that income is..is it in kind or if it is getting rice or whatever there has to be some form of income for what we do which is perform. It's not finished is it? OK! Well, it's sort of finished. How much time do I have? Good so now I have come to the bit about how to build an institution which I know nothing about. Well it's not obviously good enough to be just passionate and to have drive because we have seen enough institutions in our country that have died after the p[erson who had the passion and the drive died, or left. There is something that has come up many times that theatrewallahs are anti theory. It's come up on many levels that we are also anti formal structure. I believe, we have been managing on our own. I believe that Ninasam has a structure. And I hope that will come about a little more, at Prithvi we have been learning on the job and that has been an aggravating aspect for me how all these grandeur plans of promoting professional theatre and our own internal structure is not professional enough. But we are moving towards that and I believe it is about, clearly about building a team and it is clearly about giving responsibility over to other people who have created the institution. To give the free hand to the person who is the director. That is something we are not very good at in this country. Either we don't give free hands out at all and we ????????(Timestamp 30 19) to the organization who set it up or we create something even more dangerous which are these committees which I believe can be quite dangerous. Because they are faceless. They don't make decisions necessarily and desperately. I don't see why we can't have one person who bears the responsibility and who says " yes1 this is my fault!" or " it is my credit" and we just shy away from this system of functioning, is what I feel. Maybe in the questions, Sameera can come

up, if I should shut up now and then we can do a duet together because she is integral to building this team and to moving into slightly different way of functioning since I don't physically live in Bombay anymore since I took that oath when I saw that gun outside Prithvi theatre. I may go back one day, but I doubt it, unless there's that mall, that arts mall, then I may go back. But so I have to have a team and really for me for many many years my greatest war has been, my greatest cry has not been economic. Of course we have no money! I don't have any money as I stand here this moment. I don't have a sponsor. And I have huge dreams and I have plans and I have groups coming from UK, and from all over the place for my festival, for my basic sustenance I have no sponsor at this very moment in time but I believe we will manage, I hope, I think it is stupid to get bogged down by the lack of money. What I have always felt is that human resource being the most critical missing link. Sameera argues with me hugely on this one. And I hope she is right, she could be right. But that's something that I have found when I worked alone, which was a long long time back. Now, we are building a team and it seems that there are hidden talents in people who, like Saurabh for instance, who came in as an actor, but his capabilities are enormous, and it's fantastic and I think that's the way theatre is going to work. We are, just one more second, also planning towards actually bringing a group of people together to think very seriously on management of theatre groups. Not in bringing somebody from a management school, but somebody who is from the arts world, who has an exposure to another, and working very very closely with their nose to the ground with the community, because there's no one way how we can function. But there are definite skills we can learn and we can use in management and if we work towards setting up systems and frameworks of functioning and envisioning can actually be built otherwise we are going to have brick and mortar, which we have plenty of!