

Shyamala Vanarase:

"We have had training of theatre persons who have been members of troupes and who have been members of activist groups or who have been amateurs interested in theatre or doing their own theatre. And if we look at a child growing up today, his interest in theatre is likely to be expressed at the times of festivals, at the times of school gatherings, or family gatherings where he has this interest to perform. And this child, how about this child be trained, within the school system, within the environment, within the given socio economic environment. Because when parents are ever so focused on slotting their children to careers of money and success interchangeably defined and children being pressed into routines from 7 in the morning to 7 in the evening even before they can think of a career or anything, how can a child choose to be a theatre person? So another point about wanting to be a professional theatre person, that is, wanting to survive doing theatre, where the training for a life time and the activity available in the ground which is basically doing theatre as an activity or a hobby. I think children, I mean I have seen many children who pass through this very very tense path in which before they can make a lifetime commitment to becoming theatre persons, they need a space to explore and when one thinks of children's theatre in their dream, the dream of Bombay that Sanjana spelt out, I would certainly look at those spaces where children were exploring that were at par with children becoming engineers or chartered accountants or whatever. Typically what one finds in actual practice say for instance starting with the NSD, we have several universities with their schools or departments of drama. Then there are workshops, theatre workshops of various lengths conducted and I have seen very funny fallouts of these because there is no follow up, I mean what happens with these trainings, if it ends up in a production then that is the last day of the workshop and then the group never assembles again. But the children, when you work with the younger minds, they go away with the impression that they are now trained theatre persons. They have done a workshop and here at Ninasam, when I came with a group of children from Pune, they were a part of a recreation centre and we all came, some of them were into children's theatre and they enjoyed doing it we had a bilingual workshop her, and one of the girls she must have been about 10 or 11, she walked up to Prasad and said "Prasad dada, why don't you conduct this game?" and she described the game in detail. And Prasad was dumbfounded and he said "what do I do with this game?" and she said "no no, but it is very enjoyable". So the idea of theatre training: as part of enjoyment, as part of keeping children engaged, particularly in vacations. That's when theatre training takes places. So if we ask who gets trained, when is training taking places, how does it take place, there are all kinds of varieties, and I hope they don't turn into brands. Because the need for doing theatre and developing into the maturity of an artist doing theatre, there are two aspects of theatre that is theatre makes me as a person and theatre also on occasions heals me as a person and these effects one seems to get out of all kinds of theatrical activity. If we look at the activist theatre, though not documented I am sure that every participant and every participant observer has noticed that activist theatre has always had a stronger intellectual commitment component in it and the performance skills could be sort of untrained could be raw and still the performance would work when you go out there in the community and perform. And this is where the question of training theatre professionals gets to the preconditions of the world of theatre that children would enter after they have been trained. Where do I aspire to go? Actually coming out of NSD many of them gravitate towards Mumbai trying to find their bread and butter in the electronic media. And what happens in the world of art of theatre is something that they treat like a windfall. And I think that if one is looking at the training of theatre persons, as professionals one has to look at development of a theatre world where this

profession would make sense which also means going to the audiences and the kind of development of audiences that occurs because certain kinds of performances are created that you understand certain aspects of the language of theatre by watching performances of different kind and the kind of work that ninasam has done I need not repeat that. That kind of community will be willing and have the patience to make room for an experiment. Even if it fails. Right now, the economics of theatre has come to a situation where nobody would dare to make an experiment because nobody has the capacity to sustain economically the costs of a failure. And as I see this, young people wanting to make careers in theatre with degrees in drama and drama departments would have different approaches as to whether they concentrate more on performance or they concentrate more on critical understanding or whether they concentrate more on other administrative skills which theatre administration would need. Does one think that the position in song and drama division of the government as a possible employment and again one would have problems with the contents of the training itself. When one looks at commercial theatre, it is run as an enterprise, where the kind of aversion for results that we have been talking about here, there talent gets absorbed because their talent can survive economically. But if we are looking at institutions which will groom and nurture creativity in theatre, again, one gets to the kinds of problems created by language, by spaces for training, by spaces for rehearsals and by spaces for performance. So, in a certain sense, the traditional kind of occasion for theatre and the kind of investment of human resource that went into it and the standards of excellence which were expected, say, if you think of a gokulashtami utsav or a ganeshotsav and a play put up by colony children, for the festival, there would certainly be restrictions on the kind of script to be chosen, the kind of performance that would come up, the length of time it could take. So, purposes for which one needs to train theatre people, whether they are of this kind of a hobby oriented theatre activity or a professional theatre person, because apart from the money considerations, there is a range of basic skills of a theatre person which need to be trained and I am sure details like voice and speech and movement and music are taken care of and there comes an area of a personal kind, a personal development input where processes like disinhibition are basic to performers or processes like interpersonal sensitivity is basic to good performances and there may be a reason for an intellectual development of a person where commitment to theatre as a profession makes sense. We have been talking around all of these concerns where one sits down to formulate a kind of syllabus or curriculum for what does a syllabus for training of a theatre person would be, one tends to find that syllabus after syllabus looks at the skills part and leaving the personal development to the kind of exposures the programme will have without articulating anything that has to do with ideology. And if one keeps ideology out of the context, the kind of profession one would, be talking about can't be far from commercial. And so, whether it would be a vicious circle into which we get caught and trained theatre persons, I mean, as freelance having no method of connecting with either an activity on the ground or an activity inside a theatre space, they are just trained theatre persons and I am sure that if the dream of Bombay comes true, many of these free strugglers as the terms common for Bombay based new theatre persons, they will certainly find ways of making that dream full of content that would take away from theatre the kind of uncertainties with which it is plagued at the moment. Because finding infrastructure is bad, finding funding is worse and finding audiences is perhaps even more difficult. If one has just thought in one's own mind, this simply wouldn't be, and the value of a place like ninasam is precisely because as an institution ninasam has not been just a training institution but also an audience training institution also a performance repertory conduct which is a very different kind of managerial effort and at the same time becoming a cultural hub where theatre did not get isolated from other arts.

In terms of looking at training or building institutions for theatre training there is an issue of belief structures around make belief itself. What kind of status as an activity does making worthwhile make belief have socially? And then, one would find that even if one would have to look at the linguistic uses, in Marathi particularly it is very common that if you want to rewrite some one you would straight away say that "hay naatak band kar". Make belief is basically a flawed activity and that is something you resort to when you want to deceive. And then the whole aesthetics of natyashatra and the kind of rasa experiences that one talks about is really based on make belief in that flight away from real world into a fictional world and then kind of belief that make belief matters. One would find that audiences are also parents and teachers and officers and executives of different kind. How they relate with the kinds of images they see whether commercially or in amateur works. What is the value they place on glamour? I think one of the issues of violence done to children is about being pushed into glamour the moment they show some interest in one of the performing arts. Because one finds that around the belief structure around make belief the glamour operates, the prestige operates, the kind of image that you build of yourself as an artist operates and this where one fails to recognize or needs to recognize. Make belief involve a capacity to bend norms or to step out of them. It also involves a capacity of making rules and observing them and generating a play. I mean , in case of creating a fictional world in theatre, making one's own rules, I mean that's what styles and devices would be about , and the kind of risk taking which it would involve, that if I believe in make belief I am of course taking a great risk because there is uncertainty of outcome. When my performance starts I am not hundred percent sure as to what is going to be the outcome and yet I indulge in it every time , say, when one looks at the structure of a performance, this period of one minute concentration before the curtain opens. Then as you begin and as you move through the dramatic curve, let us say, and as you end, when you know for yourself, whether you have succeeded or no, this is the uncertainty that one takes on that whether I succeed or I fail, I would know only after the act. There are no guarantees in theatre or in make belief and this is where I feel that the training of a theatre person for belief structures around make belief is a very important area which has not been articulated. And finally, I would like to make one point about institutions, I mean, Sanjana has made some, but when institutions emerge in the flow of social processes, they tend to take on a very different structure. For instance, a company naatak in Maharashtra followed the feudal family as an organizing structure. That is the whole company will stay together, will be looked after and the 'maalak' will be like the father figure. Whereas when we think about outcomes and purposes before setting up institutions, a kind of self consciousness with which we do it. One would have to be very very careful about being informal. How does one maintain informality when one is thinking of systems and structures because that can be a very very troublesome point. And how can we escape the enterprise answerabilities which are basically financial. I think one of the self conscious goal oriented approaches which had developed in Germany in the form of GRIPS plays where adult actors took on to do plays for children and this quality of make belief can be seen . They were professional actors. By performing for children, they could sustain a whole organization. Now, this is a professional idea from people wanting to do theatre relevant in the contemporary terms, i.e., they will address problems of children, as children of that day find it. I find that the relationship between German society and GRIPS plays will of course change over the years and we need to keep this open that the relationship even of informal structures with our own society too would change. Thank You."