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Well think that SR has set the ball rolling by sticking to 20 minutes. In a sense what has happened here is the entire notion of experiment has been challenged. Working in a creative cultural field, everyday is a problem solving exercise. He's factored in the idea of audience acceptance. Do we see the audiences as a factor when looking at the work. It's one of the questions in the text box given by the organizers.

The other point was this business of interface with tradition. And there's been a lot of that going on, whether it's good or bad, or done with integrity or not, is that also what we mean by ... would we want to use experiment as a rubric over there.

The final point before I ask SM to come on in. Is I know this is something I've heard very often in Delhi, I think you talked about that in effect, cause when people walk out of a performance, or didn't like a performance and they still want to be kind, one of the kindest words they can find for it is to call it an experiment. 'yeh experiment that'. And that is such a damning kind of praise or description. And one wonders what we were thinking of when we used this word. Just as a synonym for distaste, alibi for failure, is that enough to think of when we talk about experiments? Sadanand?

Sadanand Menon

Thanks KA and SR sir. For the very broad opening that you've given us. Frankly, I do feel that the word experimentation is a very tricky word, it's a very slippery word, and has many connotations and many contexts. And obviously even for the people sitting in this room, I don't think there'll be many people who will accept it in a homogenous sense. There'll be many many takes on this, many versions on this.

So I'd like to link it to the talk with Aejaz prior to lunch.

You have to ask Q's as if things can change. It's a very important premise, when you look at anything. Textual, physical, indoors outdoors, working alone. It's the idea of change, transforming, going on a journey, coming back to the same place, knowing the same place for the first time. It's almost an unstated responsibility when you come back with that work.

The corollary. If you take something out, what do you put in its place. It's a responsibility. IN the process of something being replaced, is not being built then you create a vacuum which needs addressing.

The other question is that we need to pose new kind of Q's in an era where India is emerging as the heart of global reaction as 'Aejaz' said. If India is at the heart of GR then all of us are at the heart of GR, then what do you do with it, is there a space for resistance, bypassing, going head on, replacing, is there a space to question? Is the space for questioning, safe, or can it be subsumed into the cultural industry.

So where is the space for engagement, resistance, etc etc.

My preoccupation is not with the term experimentation. It comes from science, labs, or in one sense taking a risk, not having all the answers.

Things can go wrong, people can walk out, it can no work. But maybe even that becomes the reason you continue to work.

German choreographer, Susanna Linki. When she was invited in 1984 at the dance conference at NCPA, she said something interesting. In the last 12 years I have only given 3 performances. But I work everything. You see, when you work on the middle of stage, this is very safe, but you have to dance here, on the edge (demonstrates) that

There was a whole epistemology about making things that place where there is a risk involved. If that knowledge is not there, if that political consciousness is not there, then it's a gimmick.

Something missed.

For me, the question is, what is it, how is it, or when, does theatre, or performance, renew itself. ? This is a concern of day to day. It is a concern that you can not take for granted. There are no automatic answers, or prescribed answers.

Example. If this seminar is being counterposed with the 56 drama seminar for being prescriptive, then we have to take great care in not being prescriptive ourselves.

The very first presentation was from a great Sanskrit scholar from Chennai who knew many languages etc, the entire conference became of that tone. One of a principal speaking. The government took that tone. Suppressing tradition, high arts, etc. This tone should not creep into what we're trying to initiate here.

As soon as that tone creeps into our criticism, we enter a edicy area.

I find the word theatre problematic, because it has got into a segmentation mode. So we can easily say this is political theatre, this is social theater, this is entertainment theatre, very easy pigeon holes that have been devised that don't really lead you anywhere.

Since 9/11 mentioned 9/11 with the two planes and those 24 people going in the wtc. It became iconic. Some developed a pathology of it, applauded it.

I heard from a professor at Pratt. Which building in NYC would you want to demolish, they used to say 9/11. it used to be a steady Q for 10 years before this.

About a week after this, in Hamburg, one of the great musicians composes, Franz von Suppé. He's known for being an extremely creative composer and conductor. At the appointed time the audience, orchestra showed up.

He faced the orchestra and then faced the audience. For 10 mins he sat there silent. He stands up, puts his baton down on the chair and says 'I and you, we struggle all our lives in order to produce affect. The transformation that happens by being in the presence of the work of art' now all of you

saw what happened on 9/11. 'that visual has taken all that I have worked for away in one second. It has made my entire work redundant (check this)' and he walked away.

If you run the ET to page 2 they have a slug line, 'the political theatre'. When it began, for the connoisseurs of the Indian political theatre' they shortened it later.

They understand what spectacle is all about.

They drag everything into their maws and reconstruct it as entertainment.

While people died, and lost lives at 9/11. For the rest of us as iconic entertainment. As Schockhausen said. We have to look at that closely.

-something-

When Sudu said, 'what relevance has the natyashastra etc' has when we look at ourselves today. We should only look at the last 150 years. I think it is a self-decapitating move. To quote Lenin, 'if you can't pay respect to your past, you negate your presence' it doesn't mean living with it under your pillow. But taking its strands and using it, for example, all original myths, the things that lie at the heart of our origin myths, they have traveled throughout history, how to avoid death, stay young etc, they are timeless. For me, origin myths are very interesting. There is a very beautiful origin myth about Bharatnatyam. Where they say, when after all the first dance was Shiva on Kailasa. When he danced, there was people there, Bharatmuni, who wrote down the natyashastra, there was Parni, Patanjali, Vagyapara who were all there writing their respective shastras. There may have been a gap of 800 years between shastras, but the mythology of it was present, even all those years ago, people were looking at the joineries, the spaces between, to find a unitary process, of the performance space. And if one gives up that search, you give it up with a sense of loss.

If the threat of global industry and culture and is swamping us, do we give up? No, we find the motors and engines to exist within these spaces, and find these joineries. We need to do our homework. The FDS 56 never spoke about the material base to do this. The need for daily testing of yourself. Against certain yardsticks.

It's very peculiar that the theatre community don't relate to dancers, designers choreographies etc.

But how come when India visual art is breaking out of all boundaries and all borders, how come the VArtist is not in theatre contributing, how come the work in theatre is so abysmal?

Remember the haqueem who tells us how to chew 32 times before we swallow. These are old ideas but they have new meanings, we just have to be alert to it.

Whatever text, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, the expressive forms in all of it. One great thing that has come out of it, is the ability to chant. Chanting is ubiquitous across groups in India. It is second to breathing. It's fascinating how it has transcended all boundaries, why is it not in theatre.

We need to borrow that which is of use and power to everyone. Why did Tirugata chant Angika at the beginning of this seminar. It can't be put surgically aside. It's a methodological mistake we must avoid. I saw G. Sankara's play Kunti, directed by Kumar Sahani. He had Alaknanda Samath here, who teaches at the RSD. What Alaknanda could do, was use her resuscitative voice, the way she used the word Pratharth, touches you. It's so important to use those voices.

We have in TN the entire dalit community, who have lost their voice, but they have extraordinary rhythm. The rigour the pulse beating rigour. But it's there in every single box office chart busting Tamil film song today. It's everywhere. Singing to gana songs, and bhangra, disco bhangra.

These are elements that are very important. Obviously t.....

Up to a point, theatre seemed to be on a terrific high. Theatre was seen to be on the verge of doing huge things, but then at one point a large number of people suddenly 100 people or so, all important, went into cinema. The gain of cinema has been the loss of theatre.

We reinvented the lighting used by vk murthy in all his Gurudatt film. Which theatre seminar showed us how Bansi Chandragupta created the villages and town streets for Satyajit Ray?

We need to travel that road back, make some new connections, the biggest thing has been this need to reconnect, speak as a collective, find new hand holding strategies. Go into mainstream spaces, to find strong creative work in several disciplines and build this whole thing together.

I want to make this final concluding point. That some of the most interesting and drivers things happen at the junctions of overlapping ecosystems. Like an estuary, or a lake going into a river. The most creativity and diversity exists at those points. In a large sense it happens like that also in cultural work, and there are some fairly historic moments where these kind of things happen. I won't have time to expand, but a couple of examples.

The dancer choreographer Uday Shankar: it's a sign of times that US won't mean anything to people at a theatre centre. He set up a 'training center' not a dance training center, a "TS". He got a whole bunch of dancers, and in an attempt to make a pan Indian form.

Why are you struggling and breaking your bones like this to make a theatrical production, make a film instead. He migrated to Chennai, started to work in Gemini studios, made a film called Kalpana, unbearably bad. But there are gems in it. However, those two and a half years he spent at Gemini in Chennai, because the foundation for the birth of the extraordinary dancers you see in film today in Chennai. Chandralakha, 58 drums, dancers on drums, SI cinema has never looked back. It's a juncture. This dance was lost to stage.

Why can't a dancer walk across a stage, there are 50 different gatis and chalis and he can't walk from a to b.

Example of Kanhiyalal. Singing changed things to create a manifesto against colonialism.

I'll quickly list the 8 overlapping moments.

1. moment between Hinduism and Buddhism led to many great plays.
2. Meeting of Hinduism and Islam that led to Sufi and Bhakti.
3. the meeting between the feudal and colonial. Reforms
4. the colonial and the national that inaugurated an era of nationalist plays
5. traditional and modern in the 20th century. Counterfeit identities.

6. meeting between the folk and contemporary. The brand for commoditization.
7. juncture between acting and body.

When we learn how to negotiate this, that's when we enter theatre and politics