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Day 3 | 20th December 2019 | Theatre of the Real in India | Ayesha Susan Thomas | Geetanjali Kulkarni | Kiran Kumar | Yalgaar Sanskrutik Manch | Soumyabrata Choudhury | Moderator: Diya Naidu

Diya Naidu: I am not going to introduce anyone because these are the people we've actually watched perform. So I'm going to move very quickly to some of the things that we'd like to open the room with. Kiran is going to begin, we just saw him perform yesterday. Kiran is, as we know, a researcher, dancer, performer and goes between many roles and between many worlds that he inhabits. So this idea of traversing worlds, both in terms of geographical location— India, Indonesia, Germany, and also in terms of traditional dance form, contemporary approaches, and, more importantly, maybe the spaces between these seemingly faraway positions or places. And I think it's safe to say that Kiran is very interested in multiple entry places into those limbo spaces.

Kiran Kumar: Do you want me to speak right away? I don't have actually too much to add, except that, as I was thinking about the problem, that it's not so much of a personal problem of how to deal with making art in troubled times. It's a problem that we carry a bit more in general,— I find somehow dance is stuck in a space of symbolism. And its general condition and I mean it in a sense of, of how, like, for example, a gesture can be directly communicative— like that the one that I just made to Aditi which was *chai*. It's different if I look at an organizer, then there's a communicative gesture, it might actually lead to a cup of *chai* on the table or something like that. And then there's the gesture of me taking it and sipping it which is the more functional or instrumental one which actually leads to some liquid in your belly. But there's a in-between space where the gesture becomes symbolic and that's really where in the space between theater and dance as finding a home in the infrastructural space of theater on the stage. It's found itself for a few years, now for decades already stuck in a symbolic space. And this is stuck not just in a negative sense. It's also a weirdly archival space for dance. Yeah, simply because dance is so fluid, simply because it accommodates so many different kinds of gestures. The symbolism has also become a space for it to protect certain movements or certain ways of being. But I wonder then, if there has come a time where we don't need symbolism anymore. We can crack that bubble open and then to see what real communication and real instrumental affective movements dance can produce? You know, and it's not enough to continue this game of rolling in that glass bubble to say display, look at the symbolism. So it's a little bit there in that, zone. And I feel that this problem shattering, this is not a personal practice problem and something of course, collectively, we have to mull over. You need people from the inside and also from the outside attacking a little bit. That's what I can put on the table for now.

Diya Naidu: So I think, I guess we will all respond to each other. In terms of this particular discussion, we were looking at anchoring and even placing the work in the context of the sort of troubled times that surround us both in terms of going forward and perhaps

examples from the past of our own or other people's work. So Soumyabrata works in J.N.U as most of you know, and though he is in academia, he is also engaged or has been engaged with performance in the past. And he'd like to share a little bit about what he has done. And also, while we are attempting to discuss the works of these practitioners in the context of the political urgency that we're surrounded by, something that, for example, none of us could have exactly foreseen even when this conference was itself imagined, for example, so you know, "the real" in that sense. So we will talk about presence and location of the artists in relation to these troubled world realities. But also, Soumyabrata wants to particularly share something about the absence of the artists. And also, as he was saying earlier, in terms of this thing of "Theater of the Real" and this question of what happened and what is happening, and then this idea of if we're using the word real, more as an adjective, and not a noun. Then is that real? Is that reality that the real is referring to, almost always a problematic reality? Which is kind of I guess what Kiran is saying, which is when he says in dance, in the world of dance rather, do we need symbolism no more in that sense and is this "real" then a conceptual object that we then anchor with archive document or body?

Soumyabrata Chowdhury: - Thank you Diya. So, just on this question of the real, actually this change of the normal noun form, reality to this adjective made into a noun, the real. The phrase "Theater of the Real" actually exists because of the translation of a certain vocabulary, which can degenerate into jargon of course. The French word *réel* is, now, due to the French influence in English theory, used in the phrase "Theater of the Real," otherwise usually in English we say reality. Real is an adjective. So that itself is something to think about, this is actually a specialized word. And books have been written about this. And "Theater of the Real" is also part of a book. Anyway, I don't want to get into that, but I thought we should keep this in mind. It's actually a specialized word.

Now about my own work, but I don't perform anymore, really. I'm a performer without papers here. But it's okay, you kind of listen to me as if I'm a performer, in the sort of subjunctive. So in 1998, I'm speaking accordingly to what I did in the past. I did a performance at the Shri Ram Center Delhi which was called *Tête a Tête with Antonin Artaud*. Antonin Artaud, of course, was a very important person from the history of theater, who is known for his great theater sort of idea called Theater of Cruelty. But he also had a very troubled life. Life of extreme suffering. So actually what happened was between 1938 and 1946, eight years, he was in several lunatic asylums in France. So the last asylum in which he was housed is a place called Rodez. He came out of that place in 1946, and he died in 1948. So I did this performance based on the, well literally the documents of that historical period, including Artaud's own writings—'46 to '48. So between '46 and '48, he did one public performance, which was called *Tête a Tête with Antonin Artaud*. So what happened in that performance, according to the documents, is that at nine o'clock the performance started. It is a theatre called *Théâtre du Vieux Colombiere*. It is one of the middle level theaters. It is not very big. It is not a black box. It can accommodate around 900 people, which is more than the capacity. So the man was really...he was of course also a film actor in his 20's. Carl Dreyer's film, *Joan of Arc*, you can see him. He was extremely handsome, but very thin. So I'll talk about that. He had an eating problem. He couldn't eat. Finally then nine o'clock the performance started, which was actually a performance of his poetry. He was a poet. He was starting to read his poetry, then what happened was the papers which were kept on the rostrum of the desk, fell down. And then he started searching for the papers, and he got

completely mixed up. There he stood up and started giving slangs to the audience. Yeah, he abused them, the worst sort of abuse, saying for the last eight years, you are the ones who tortured me. You are the ones who give me electric shocks. You know, now the fact is among those 800, 900 people there were several very noted French intellectuals, including probably Andre Gide, and Simone De Beauvoir, the great feminist. And they had actually done a signature campaign to get him out of the asylum. And he was abusing them. But that's the point, and then he collapsed on stage. People were so stunned, they didn't know what to do.

Now I, in my own readings of the history of theater in that period, found that one of the intellectuals came up on stage, I'm not sure who that was, probably the writer Andre Gide. He came to the stage, held his hands and took him like this. And he was like, he lost his energy in his legs, he kind of went out of the wings. So basically one of those really, really rare performances, where the performance failed. But something well, real happened. So, in that sense the real was exactly the moment where performance stops — in the sense that performance is something which is programmed, matrixed, meant to succeed. So this thing was basically my part of the performance. But of course you can see that my performance was paradoxical, I was performing, I have no plans of collapsing. I am not Artaud. And hope so this doesn't happen with me. So how to do this? This is a paradox right? So how to do the failure successfully. A type of document where no document exists. It was a challenge however it was not so mainstream, the interesting thing is, so I did this performance in '98 when I used to mostly work for People's Union for Democratic rights P.U.D.R. So I have many friends, one among those was a *Times of India* journalist. He came for the performance, he was not into theater, but he's a very serious person who had a good knowledge of history. So he saw the performance. And he said it was one hour, ten minutes long— Shri Ram center's stage is a very big stage. It took lot of efforts to perform there. When it was done then he came to me, he said, it's okay Shomo, whatever you did, but what you said was between '38 to '46 or '48, and you didn't even mention the Second World War. He was criticising me. But you're doing something at the heart of the Second World War and you don't mention it, and I said, can't you see what is happening here? Precisely, because that man is in asylum, where world war is going on, someone misses the world war. You know, so something which we take to be given, if there's a world war, that everyone is part of it. And yet there are some people who, in a sense, miss something as big as that. In that sense, again, the real, exactly where that document is, is a kind of void. There is documentation of Artaud. There are many, which is about his madness, the letters he wrote, but not in the sense of, for instance, his engagement with the war because there is no such engagement. He's in an asylum. The reality for him is electric shocks, not the Second World War. And he's an actor. So I thought that is something I'd like to really do something with. So this is the first problem. So, to me, the real is a kind of problem as different from the reality, which is a kind of meaning. So I'll give you an example of that workshop, theater workshop level exercise.

So, for instance, if we were to just do a workshop together and say, what's that? Chair. What's that in my eye? Light. Which means what these are realities, but we know we are not seeing reality we are actually seeing meaning, the meaning of that object, we are not saying someone is tall or someone is standing. You're saying light. That is the meaning of that reality. But imagine I stand up here and suddenly I start walking up to you, while

walking I come so near you, I hit you. That moment would be something which would be real in the sense of where meaning would fail. You would say what happened to him? It happens with me every time nowadays but it means people have come to know that he couldn't see. But that moment when something happens is real, as it is different from reality. So real is a moment where reality actually fails. You know, that's how I look at it. And in the history of theater, Artaud's theatre had a moment like that. So what was my big problem as an actor on stage? I still use the old word actor, not performer. I don't feel comfortable calling myself a performer. That's just an idiosyncrasy, don't worry about that. So my big problem was that moment of the collapse. How will I do it? Because there are no words, nothing. And if I only act like sitting down and like it then it feels so much you know like to imitate. He's doing something, doing good, doing bad but at one level it's false at the same time it's an acting convention. So what do I do there? So there is a last point otherwise we can discuss the whole night in this matter.

Last point, so the thing is that I, again through my readings of Artaud, I came to realize, I came to know that Artaud had an eating disorder, actually had cancer. And you know, those days cancer detection was not so fast. So he probably didn't know till the very last moment before he died that he had cancer. He couldn't eat. So before he died, one day before he died, he visited his friend Paule Thevenin, who was also his, who inherited the rights to his works. He wrote profusely. Paule Thevenin had the rights. So he was visiting her before he left, we find in one fragment of his writing something extraordinary. A kind of act of speech, though he wrote it like a poem. And I used it as part of my script, which was this "Paule". Now the French pronunciation is Paul but I would deliberately do it wrong, an Indian speaking French. Let's put it like this, because I got a different kind of, I won't do it here, but I got a different kind of whatever vulnerability—Paule instead of simply Paul. Paul sounded too, you know, straight. Paule sounded more... Yeah, then he says Paule, I am hungry, I have no appetite. So I was really working with this eating disorder, it doesn't mean you're not hungry, but you're hungry and you have no appetite. What to do with this? So I brought that to the moment and I'm not saying it worked, probably didn't work. But what I did in the first performance was the poster of that performance which says *Tête a Tête with Antonin Artaud*. I put it on the downstage, center. And I started using a voice over, it was a long Artaud poem. What I was doing on the stage, I was eating the poster and vomiting it. So I compulsively chew it but the moment, it would kind of enter my throat here. I would keep doing it, so it was something interesting, but it didn't work. The people there did not understand anything and as it was complicated. Anyway, then after many years, I got an invitation to perform this in Calcutta by a Third Theater group, alternative theater festival it was called *Bibhabhan*. And they asked me to perform it in an open air space in the *YMCA, Calcutta*. Rustom would know that space and some others. So I've performed it. Again, the same problem at that moment, what do I do, to kind of where it is pure real, and at that moment, I set a line from a poem which I don't know from where it came, I said it, which is a Bengali poem, so it was all in English. And at that moment, exactly when it was happening, then I say this line. "Chobi uncle, will I get cured someday"? Now this line literally would mean Chobi uncle— Chobi uncle is an uncle, uncle Chobi, Chobi is also a picture. Chobi uncle, will I get cured? Shall I ever be cured? Now this line actually is from a Joy Goswami poem, Joy Goswami today is an extremely famous Bengali poet, very successful. This poem was something that he wrote before he became famous in a very small collection of poetry. And a friend of mine in J.N.U gave this to me, and I got it. And I kind of brought this poem to

actually insert it and in a way for the first time I got it. But for a very specific regional audience in a specific language. But it worked! Because that line, which is a fictional line, poetic line, actually spoke exactly what real was, which is the question— Will I ever be cured? That's it. Thank you.

Diya Naidu: Okay, we'll move over to Ayesha, who is a director. She also works with children. And she's going to be sharing with us shortly, a very new play that she's working on, which is about the female body in Indian textbooks. I'm just going to let you speak.

Ayesha Susan Thomas: Yeah my performance is after the panel. It's a work in progress. It's not ready. So Kai and Anuja asked us to think about what making art in troubled times was like, and, from my perspective, most of my work is only with children. So I'll just speak from that perspective. And I have a lot of questions and no answers. So I think it's particularly weird how in education, where you envision that it's most urgent to be aware of the world that you live in, because the children are literally inheriting that world, it's often the very last place that is aware, of the world in which we live, often the most conservative place. So I always find that contradiction very confusing. And how we somehow are supposed to shelter children and protect them from what happens around. And yet, you can only do that to a certain extent. So how do we as teachers and as arts teachers who teach theater, teach the arts who work in the arts, it's something I'm constantly wondering .How do we have that conversation? When kids want to make politically sensitive work some schools don't like that. Sometimes it makes parents uncomfortable. Often adults are way more uncomfortable than the children are. How much is age appropriate? And when is it not? How much is okay for the curriculum and how much is overstepping and turning into something else. And of course, teachers are human beings, none of us are neutral. And we all have our very own specific political affiliations. And I worked, I used to work in a very right wing, quite a conservative school. And the school had a very clear political affiliation of which mine was the opposite. So it was very interesting being in class with those kids. And we'd have the relative freedom of being in a classroom without a CCTV camera, so you could actually do what you want. So you know that there are certain things you're not supposed to mention, but then you do it and then you think, am I abusing my privilege of being in this room, as an adult, as a teacher with access to these children, and I taught teenagers, so they all got their own opinions. It's amazing. So I have all these questions, you know, how do you navigate? How does one navigate being in that weird binary that education has, that you have to be aware but not that you are not aware. You have to protect them, but they have to deal with it. The outcome of what happens is their cross, not yours. We'll all be dead. Those are my questions.

Diya Naidu: So we will come back to a lot of those questions. I just want to invite Yalgaar to speak. So we have Pravin, Dhamma and Siddharth. And we were talking about some of the things that we were talking about obviously in your form, in Jalsa form, the politics has, as we just witnessed, it's like we have a strong sense of the political message and the political agenda and an intention. So I was wondering as artists...how much freedom you have to not respond to the politics? Or are you willing to get martyred for your form? If you want to do something else then do you have freedom? Or, in the current climate which is everywhere around you, do you have self-permission? Can you give this permission as an artist to yourself. For example if you want to make a performance on a tree. Does it have to always

be only on revolutionary ideas or principles of democracy. Not necessarily unrelated but may be not this obvious. Can you see yourself where you allow yourself this freedom? And what about self-censorship? One type of censorship is from outside. We know that if we speak this we will get detained, if we speak that it can create problems. But you, yourself in which way and for what reason, will you censor yourself, if at all? If you want say anything else that you feel is relevant, do tell us.

Dhammarakshit Randive: There were many questions, I forgot from where to start. What was the first question? We see the situation like this— maybe, first the people in the movement were people who were affiliated to a political party's cultural troop. So for those people I feel they used more that framework to make art— you have to take this agenda forward like Annabhau Sathe has also worked. Many groups also do till now. There are many who have affiliations with different political parties and carry forward the agenda of that political party, and they work as their cultural troops. So maybe they have that extra framework. They have to talk within the same frame. Of course certainly, they have a plan, this word should come at the end, for example, “Red red betel leaf red,” that’s what happens. So, likewise, maybe as Seva Dal used to sing some songs. But we don't keep any direct affiliation with any political party. That's why we try to increase our understanding of Ambedkarite politics, get to know different things. That's why we don't feel ourselves tied down. We try to explore more in this form, for example, there is a protest in Aarey in Mumbai. We are going there too and we had a hope of learning there too. So we try to engage with different protests/movements and learn from there. When we first started the movement, there was a song called “The attack on the Dalits” which all of us used to sing, and it was about the government and how they trick us. This was written by our older poets and that had a particular kind of expression, then we later worked with LGBT partners. Then we started understanding gender, we feel like we need to write with a different sensitivity today. Because we have a friend named Disha Sheikh who works extensively with the third gender community. So I feel like, because of her, we can upgrade our politics a little bit, to openly understand it. So we are moving in this track, we work on different subjects even with things we don't know. So in this political environment we must say this is important but we do it according to the constitutional frame, think of how we can take it further. So if we want to talk about the environment, then we collaborate. Everyone is working by choosing their specific area, so we are also choosing our area, but we need to do some collaborative work with each other. If one can go further, one should go. We are looking at it from this point of view.

Self-censorship? What one has seen happening due to the political climate for example with many artists, like Kabir Kala Manch, they are suffering very much. So we need to strategically handle some things. Like what do we need to carry with us? Who is the audience we are playing to? For this we need to self-censor accordingly. So we do not believe in creating commotion for no reason. But to understand how many people support us or understand us. And we go to different places, take workshops and encourage them to make their own cultural troops. In Kankauli, Konkan there is an organisation called Sathyshodhak Sanghatan, we went there, did workshops and performances and made a cultural troop there. In Mumbai also we performed with different organizations and different NGO's. So newer, younger folks are getting ready, they think differently. People don't come because there it is brand but because they wish to. We do not encourage

unnecessary commotion but we do take a stand, cleverly, because it is a long fight not a short one. We have deep faith in Baba Saheb and his teachings and we follow the constitutional route. Because there are constitutional ways. So we try and let's see if time can provide a solution in the future. Time will signal it and we need to hear that signal. So there is censorship, but we don't face problems but we need to tread strategically. For example we performed a show in Delhi called *Rela*. There were people from different states and we were performing in a garden there. We made a satirical skit called *Anti-national*. In that a man is eating *wada pav* and he says it's very tasty. And he asks the vendor which *chutney* was used? And the vendor says, green *chutney* and that's why he is called anti-national. The play was happening in Gurgaon and a crowd came and said stop this show, because they accused us saying we were Congress party workers. So these types of things occur. So at that time, the audience there supported us, and told the miscreants, you need to give them space to talk...so such type of incidents happen. In this case we need to go strategically as those people who are linked with movement, they understand the issue, talk to them and those who are newcomers, bringing their own issue just like what we saw in Aarey, some new people feel nature should be preserved, came for one day and the police arrested them. Their parents were crying and thinking about the career of their children. There should be some space where people can come together and talk. So this is all about censorship, we need to work very carefully. Like on the occasion of Shivaji's birth anniversary, we got a phone call to do a program. It was a subsidiary organisation associated with Shiv Sena. We performed, we were asking Maratha women to join in the songs. But they were reluctant to sing with us. Because the men from their community were there and watching them. So performing for a Dalit audience is a different experience than this. We were asking these women to sing and clap with us—say Hail Shiv Rai! Hail Bhim Rai! They were hailing Shiv Rai, but not Bhim Rai.

Siddharth: Yes, but we said that if there is Shiv Rai, there is Bhim Rai also. It's their tradition so we have to go there at our own risk, otherwise it's not possible.

Dhammarakshit Randive: In this way we are breaking out of our comfort zone a little bit. People invite us to Ambedkar's birth anniversary celebrations, and we loudly say, Hail Bhim! The atmosphere gets electric. But that is not enough how can we reach new and more people. But through the caste politics in Maharashtra, everyone has their own idol. This is a community. He has one idol, he is great. He will say Baba Sahab is great, someone will say someone else is great, a competition is in the making. Everyone is fighting for their own identity, leaving aside real issues. Then make a statue of that symbol or existence. So this thing is being worked on.

Diya Naidu: Thank you, we'll come back and we'll respond, I just want Geetanjali to present. So we were talking about Geetanjali's work which she presented the day before yesterday, and almost like in juxtaposition in a sense to kind of how their form is, Geetanjali was talking about reaching out to those people who are already a little bit on the edge. So without just preaching to the converted, to pull over those who are thinking already about it. And we were talking in the morning about the work being eerily preparatory, almost like a document for the unfortunately probable case of violence and riots. And so, this idea of making the play intimate where she wants to now go into the living rooms and courtyards of her audiences. They don't have to get up and walk out and say we don't support this, like go

back to Pakistan like what happened at the Dastaan concert a few days ago. So it's not agit prop in that form, that we've seen it but is it a kind of theater of conversion? A theater of invitation to transformation? And this is the intimate engagement in the way that you envision? These are just some of the questions.

Geetanjali Kulkarni: Yes, that day I think after the performance there was this question whether there will be retaliation from the people, if I go to personal spaces. So I forgot to mention one thing that before going to people's houses, I will of course inform them. I will not necessarily give the whole script to them, but I will inform that it will be about '92-'93 riots. I'm going to tell you the stories of those victims. So if they agree, only then I will go to the space and tell the stories. And I have realized, whatever two, three groups I interacted with, I performed for, that they are not necessarily in agreement with what I said. There were different stories, different interpretations, but that discussion has to happen, that exchange has to happen. And we have to do the seeding. And I have to tell my experience because my experience as a performer, as a person, as an individual, from a very right wing family, because of art, because of theatre, because of meeting different types of people has changed me for good, has given me a lot of peace of mind. I feel relaxed. I don't feel agitated. I feel I grew as a person, so why not give chance to those people. And if love, compassion, inclusion is going to make us better human beings, why not, and it's not about hate. I feel very sad for my father, I feel very sad for my family, that they didn't get this opportunity to be more loving, to be more open, to be more inclusive, so I feel that we have to give this opportunity, like we say, that we have to give opportunity to the underprivileged. We have to give opportunity to people who are from less privileged class. Likewise, we have to give opportunity to privileged people who have not got the opportunity to think of inclusion. So let us build the bridges, because that's going to make a better society I know this is a very utopian thought, I know I'm being hopelessly hopeful, but we don't have any other alternative. Maybe after 30 years we all won't be here on earth. And I wish that humankind is dead. But since we are living, let's try to make peace with ourselves and with each other. And this is the only way I feel. And as far as there is discomfort, that discomfort is always going to happen. Like I was telling somebody that day after performing, I felt why am I putting my father into this picture, when he is not even alive. And why am I saying all these things. So these are emotional upheavals which I'm going to face or which some people who will listen to these stories will also face. But as I feel like I'm an ardent follower of Narendra Dabholkar, and he had said that as a majoritarian, it's our duty to become uncomfortable, get out of that comfort zone and act like big sisters or big brothers. And, you know, play a role, which is for the benefit of the society. Again I don't know what I spoke.

Diya Naidu: Thank you, Geetanjali. Would you like to ask each other, any questions or engage with what came up? Or anybody else? Would the room like to respond?

Audience Question: This is coming back to what you just said Geetanjali. We're talking about othering in various ways of excluding in somebody, but I'm not entirely sure that the opposite of othering is inclusion. And I don't know how to answer this yet, because inclusion makes an assumption that there is a...I don't know how to describe it and I don't think assimilation is the opposite of othering either. I don't know what the answer is but I'm just putting this out, not even sure if this is relevant to this conversation but I speak from the

perspective of the archive as well, that there have been privileges, there have been hierarchies, and in the way archives have been structured historically, and even from that perspective, one has to think, you know, what are we trying to compensate by, quote, unquote, including something or are we trying to... it's easy to say mosaic archive, as I said this morning but when we think of... Sorry. Now I'm ranting. I don't know what the opposite of othering is.

Geetanjali Kulkarni: When I say inclusion. I also mean to respect the diversity. I am not saying that we are colouring everybody into, you know, in one color, but also accepting. When I mean inclusion, it's a circle. And it's not even if I am brown, somebody is white, somebody is black, whatever. And we all are in a circle, there is no distinction of others and me, or others and us. Inclusion doesn't mean, one nation, one world. One, whatever one language. Inclusion means not being exclusive. I cannot in this world, in today's world when we are talking about equal rights when you're talking about giving power, empowering people, we cannot be exclusive. We always have to be inclusive in the sense that we have to accept each and every entity. That's what I mean by inclusive and not which means everybody will speak Hindi or English. Everybody will speak different languages and they have that right and those are very beautiful. It's about hope. It's not us and others or othering, you know, not killing somebody's characteristics, that's what I think you were talking about.

Audience Question: Sorry I came in a little late so maybe it's already been covered, but one of the things that I had found quite interesting, perhaps from you and maybe from you, gentlemen. Certainly, the Chinese gentleman who was here yesterday, is in an environment like we have in India today. I was very interested to hear about just some of the techniques like one of the techniques you mentioned yesterday about very fast scrolling of messages, any other kind of practical ideas where one can get a message out without getting into too much trouble. Or, you know, immediately being shut down. Number one, other things. Perhaps on a slightly different level like obviously humour, or making the message very subtle of going about it in an oblique way so that people only when they get home they realize what the message is, but any thoughts on that, any other sort of practical tips of how we in this environment go about delivering important messages without being immediately shut down?

Zhao Chuan: Yeah. There are a couple of ideas. I wish we would not need to have them. In 1949 the Communist Party and the Liberation Army defeated Kuomintang, the Nationalists Party. So this take-over constitutes the power situation that we have in China now. So, in order to deal with the governmental interferences you mentioned, some theater productions set their plays in environments prior to 1949. So then immediately you are able to blame all these corrupt officials. Such settings sometime go as far back as Qinq Dynasty or even Tang Dynasty. Yeah, this is one of the way they did it, and there are a couple of quite successful productions. This is one way and also related to my own work in the early times, we are using lots of physical forms. To avoid saying stuff directly, but still people with the understanding of certain references or images or sort of some whatever, will get it. Then you get the messages through. Yeah. So, there is always a way. Thank you.

Geetanjali Kulkarni: I think art, theater is the way we always keep things going, like we are talking now. It is the oral tradition for example, the hymns of Tukaram were forgotten but people remembered it and they are singing today. So, what I think is technology is not going to help us, our memory is going to help us. Singing those poems and songs might help us to retain, to communicate or to share or to keep history alive maybe.

Ayesha Susan Thomas: I think also just anything that looks harmless, is right for opportunities. So, for example, nursery rhymes and lullabies are easy because you're singing them to children, but other people also hear them. Also like in Brazil when abortion was illegal. Women found that on the gastric pill, there was a misoprostol prescribed for gastric ulcers, and it warned pregnant women to not take it. So they realized it could cause an abortion. So you use a gastric ulcer tablet to have a safe abortion. So, things that go around the other way you know, just to find things that seem harmless to get your own way through.

Audience Question: I just want to connect quickly to this question of representation and strategy, just quickly to give an example. Like when we curated Yalgaar's work. They had already told me that they get arrested very often, just sometimes on their way to a performance. So we didn't use your name. Some of the young people I work with said how could this happen, their name should be there. So as a representation, other people were angry on their behalf. Okay. They were like you must put their name. I said okay let me have a chat with them, I will call and ask you for a strategy to have you performing here. We agreed on to put the names of the three, but didn't put the name of the collective. So someone will say it's politically wrong, you did the wrong thing but I think we did a clever thing, we did a quiet thing, what was important to have them perform. No really, a lot of people said I think you're being unfair, just because they are from a different caste from you, so I faced a lot of flak for taking out the name. But I called Dhamma and asked him can we do this, right? So this was just a strategy also. So it wasn't a representation of you, inaccurately, but we wanted you to perform.

Diya Naidu: If there's an urgent and burning question anywhere... okay, would you like to?

Soumyabrata Chowdhury: You know that story that I narrated to you is eventually about some fragment of poetry, coming from some other language from the original context, which is in English translation, French history. But poetry as such, what we listened today about Tukaram and Kabir. Poetry, performance we say it, theater we say it, is always the most straight and most complex thing at the same time. So I feel poetry as such, this is the first thing, and I and Rustom were talking about this then, there is one more thing in poetry, poetry does both the things. Poetry is language in a certain way, in a certain pleasurable way and kind of profoundly. Why? Not just because of the words and their meaning, because of tonality, because of song, because what we listen to is different in words. So you can't control that and in fact to that question my response is from the other side. What is it people react to? What is it that gets performers arrested? Is it necessarily the so-called theme, the solid center? Or is it something actually something very accidental? And yet poses such a big threat, that the entire state trembles. So to me poetry is both that central thing and that accidental thing. Both the possibility and the greatest danger. You know, that's one. The second thing about document, document is not just a matter of the

document, is always a name. So cataloging, indexing, these things are crucial for a document. So how do we find the document, we find it by name and from that name people identify the document. So in this era how much we say that it's about nationalism. I don't think it is a solid political theory about nationalism. This is an assault of some specific names, whether it is cow or beef.

Diya Naidu: And I'd like to close. Kiran if you are okay to respond to this, because we were talking about it in the morning. And at one point Kiran was talking about how, you know, we were asking this question of are we to say then that at this moment in time are all artists activists? Is it meaningless to say I'm an Indian artist? Does it automatically now mean that I am an Indian activist because I noticed that word being used interchangeably more and more. And, yeah, and just the last component of that would be, that if we are talking about theater as you know for agitation, for transformation for even for coming into wholeness or healing, is it sort of fair to say that, sorry I lost my train of thoughts, give me a minute. Yeah, is it possible for certain kinds of theater to, in this point in time, not be that urgent? Does all theater now therefore have to respond in a certain way? Does it have to be urgent? Of course there are many ways of saying what we want to say but is there meaning? Is there any meaning and relevance now for theater that is, maybe gentler? That takes more time that is not hitting you on the head with a bottle? And what does that mean? Is that possible?

Kiran Kumar: That was actually a difficult point. I mentioned that in my last few visits I do find this difficulty in claiming the position of an artist, without the gulp in my throat and that I feel, obviously, what is in need is a different kind of engagement with reality. But that said, again, having this position of oscillating between the worlds, between studio and the field the open ended question for me is all related to the preserved practice of dance. It's almost a little pickled thing that we bring. It's next to irrelevant, but somehow it's on the table and it's about what we make of it, and something with this kind of a discussion for me is the possibility or even the necessity of locating the political within the somatic, rather than as something that emerges from a certain kind of a discourse or from the consensus of a certain linguistic engagement like a conversation. Not to take this away because it's very valuable but to reduce it or to distill it, reduce is not the word, to distill it into a position in the body where even the very primary stance, or this idea of occupying a position or standing or standing still has that political agency and for that it is a very silent agency. But it is agency and it is an activated position. And I think when we do not have that somehow I seemed to think that all other hacks that we seem to find are not built on very strong foundation and I wonder how high to climb on these structures. So it's somewhere there and here I do feel simultaneously there is something in dance that it silently has to offer to all of this debate.

Audience Question: Maybe I want to comment on that. And then I pass it on. So because I immediately had to think about this quote by Heiner Mueller, one of the most political authors of the 20th century maybe, considered to be a political author working under socialism and censorship and all that and he once said, "If you have a message, then you can send a telegram." So this quote points to the question, where do we find the political content? In the very obvious statement that is uttered on stage? So where do we search politics? There is the politics of how we meet, there is the politics of the perception and I

think here, now we are really entering the art. This is why I wanted to do this comment as a co-curator with Anuja of these works that we now have seen. We have seen so many different performative works engaging with realities. We have this new iteration of Boalian teaching play form connected to *December 1992*. We have your strong musical performance. We have your thing blurring the boundaries between moving images, moving bodies, we have witnessed this invisible theater of the digital age with what Amitesh is doing. Some people shouting their political claims and you could also just send a telegram or post them on Facebook. Let's really see what artistic strategies can be used. Okay, so then, I don't want to have the last word, so Mangai, you will have it now. Because I also want to tell why we are a little bit in urgency because we know that at six, there will be a soundcheck, and at seven there will be a concert which will with its public announcement system, it will blow us away. So we have to close by seven, and the earlier we begin the less interference we will have with our upcoming performance.

Mangai: Kiran, thanks for that comment you know about standing, standing still. I just want to use the word nurturance, you know, and I'm thinking of Amitesh's performances yesterday of Habib on Habib at certain kind of celebration, a certain way of returning to our senses, in a very, very conscious way. I think it is going to go a long way. Much more than all the screams and shouts that we want to do and, you know, I think pushed into doing it but I think we really need to keep that sanity, in our center. I think we really need to nurture ourselves into a sense of celebration into a sense of togetherness, into a sense of knowing that our senses are intact you know, so I really feel there is a way to do it. And I think we should work on it.