

## **Stepping Stones:**

### **Engaging with Youth in South Asia on Sexual Violence And Impunity**

Report of a Workshop for Theatre Practitioners and Performing Artists  
Visthar, Bangalore, 4-5 February, 2019  
Organised by Untitled Arts, Bangalore

*Resource persons:* Shabari Rao, Anuradha HR, Shobha Raghavan, Anuja Ghosalkar, Bidisha Mahanta, Laxmi Murthy

The workshop was attended by 25 participants: 6 male, 15 female and 4 transgender, most of whom were meeting each other for the first time. All the participants had been contacted personally and had some background in theatre, performing arts, poetry and/or music. Almost half were professional theatre artistes.

#### **Day 1, February 4, 2019**

The morning session on Day 1, facilitated by Shabari Rao, began with getting to know the names of all participants using a ball throw exercise and then moved on to an introductory exercise where each person met with five others and asked/answered a question. Later each person was introduced by the five people who chatted with them in the earlier part of the session.

Laxmi Murthy then provided the background to the project and the historical context of the research into sexual violence and impunity. A brief about the books published and the process involved was shared.

In the next session, facilitated by Shabari Rao and Bidisha Mahanta, the whole group was introduced to specific texts (which were also shared in an email prior to the workshop) and some of the details of the texts were highlighted. Smaller groups were formed based on which text each person wanted to work with. The idea of a 'social atom' (an exercise from psycho-drama) was introduced to help participants engage with the text. In this exercise the main players are identified and arranged in the space depending on their relationship to the central event/player. This helps with understanding the power and other social dynamics that are operating within a given situation. It also helps with moving away from the linear narrative of the written text.

Post lunch, each small group found a space in the sprawling tree-filled campus to work and they began to get deeper into the text. There was a lot of discussion in the small groups and each group used performance tools like role play and abstract imagery to both understand the text as well as share it with the larger group at the end of this session.

The evening witnessed four short excerpts from longer performances shared in an informal setting. The diverse performances led to a short discussion on body itself as text, ways of using text in performance and gender/justice etc. The performances were: Lady Anandi (Anuja Ghosalkar); Head 2 Head (Anuradha HR, Kriti Bettadiah and Vidya Ulithaya); Body Mine (Shabari Rao) and a performance by Nisha about the life of transgender individuals.



There was a lot of informal discussions over dinner and after. There seemed to be strong responses to the Zubaan material. For example, the notion of how do we portray these stories without trivialising or flattening them, since we might not have been through these experiences. Are we equipped show these stories? Questions of authorship and representation also came up. There was also some discussion on how this material can be used, that is, as performers its not that we have to take the stories and make them into performances, but use them as points of reference of either narratives or approaches or both, in the way we approach issues of sexual violence and impunity.



## **DAY 2, February 5, 2019**

Five people gathered for a gentle yoga session in the morning, and conversations continued over breakfast in small informal groups.

Anuja Ghosalkar, shared her work in Documentary Theatre. This session problematized the authorship question for the group and also gave us a glimpse into how text can be actively engaged with for example if it were a 'monument' How do we 'enter' a text? How do we navigate it? How do we 'deface' it?

Shobha Raghavan led a session introducing image theatre from Theatre of the Oppressed. This gave the group a chance to work directly with their bodies and to process and respond to the material so far from a personal space.

Responding to the request expressed the previous day about the need for more grounding in the theory and history of current concepts and campaigns, Laxmi Murthy shared a power point presentation that showed the history of women's

movements in India through the posters of the movement from the Zubaan Poster Women archive. She drew attention to how the imagery in the posters moved from quite literal and direct imagery to more abstract imagery that implied violence or abuse.

The afternoon saw small group work where ideas were to be developed to present at the end of the day. During the closing session it was clear that most individuals/groups had not yet arrived at clear ideas or forms that they wanted to work with. The session became more about the questions that came up for each person and some reflection on what the whole two day workshop meant for them. Participants were assured of support to develop ideas, source and discuss material relevant to the ideas they wanted to explore as possible performances.



Annexure 1: **AGENDA: Stepping Stones Workshop, Bangalore, 4-5 February, 2019**

<b>Day 1 (4th Feb)</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Resource people</b>	<b>Materials/ Notes</b>
9.30 - 10.30	Introductions	Shabari	Individual intros to work and interests Might be done through some game
10.30 - 11.30	Introduction to project	Laxmi	To discuss documentation and video permissions. Also to discuss confidentiality and group ground rules
11.30 - 12.00	TEA		TEA!
12.00 - 1.30	Introduction to the texts and current project (small groups working with texts)	Bidisha/ Shabari	Start getting familiar with the texts, begin to choose something to work with. Some reading exercises
1.30 - 2.30	LUNCH		LUNCH
2.30 - 4.30	Performance and text (social atom)	Shabari	Performance workshop that explores ways of engaging with concepts/texts that we are working with. Some small group work <b>Materials: Paper, pens, sound system</b>
4.30 - 5.00	TEA		TEA
5.00 - 7.00	Performance Showcase	Laxmi, Shabari, Anu/Krit/Vidya, Anuja, Andrea	Showing excerpts of performance work. Contextualised by Laxmi. Can be opened up to other participants

			Materials needed: sound system, performance space to be set up and audience seating.
7.00 - 7.30	Open time/overflow/buffer time		
7.30	DINNER		DINNER

<b>Day 2 (5th Feb)</b>	<b>Session</b>	<b>Resource person</b>	<b>Materials/ Notes</b>
7.00 - 8.00	Yoga (optional)	Shabari	Mats if available
8.30 - 9.30	BREAKFAST		
9.30 - 11.00	Performance session	Anuja Ghosalkar	Documentary Theatre
11.00 - 11.30	TEA		TEA
11.30 - 1.00	Theatre of the Oppressed	Shobha Raghavan	Tools of TO
1.00 - 2.00	LUNCH		
2.00 - 3.00	Other geographies	Bidisha	What are the other groups doing. Contextualising this work
3.00 - 4.30	Working on Ideas	Shabari	Small group work where ideas are developed to present at the end of the day
4.30 - 5.00	TEA		TEA
5.00 - 6.30	Presentation and wrap up	Laxmi, Shabari	

## Annexure 2: Participant details for Feb 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> workshop

<b>Name of Participant/ group</b>	<b>Names</b>
Nam company	Surabhi Vashisht
	Sunayana Premchander
	Anshuman Acarya
	Lekha Naidu
	Sidharth Madyamika
Urban Folk Project	Shilpa Mudbi Kothakota
	Sreekanth
Artistree	ChandraKeerthi
	Vidya Ulithaya
The Big Fat Company	Krithi Bettadh
	Basav Biradar
Badhuku college	SHIVA KUMAR M
	Yogini
	Sandhya Rani
Bangalore Theatre company	Sushma
	Ujwala
Antaranga	Bhamini
Funny Feminist	Padmalata Ravi
Azim Premji University	Andrea Pereira
Drama Queen	Anuja Ghosalkar
Shoonya	Shilok
	Shobha Raghavan
Sangama	Nisha
	Varsha
	Ashwini