



On behalf of everyone at the India Foundation for the Arts, I am delighted to welcome you this evening to the first of many festivities to mark **20 years of celebrating the arts** at IFA. It's amazing to see here today our founder, grantees, trustees, supporters and donors, staff who have been part of this journey and many friends without whom we would certainly not be here today.

It has been an unforgettable journey for IFA that continues, with shared experiences and passionate quests, creating the space, setting the mood and supporting the cruise and the treks of so many artists and scholars. We have facilitated over 370 projects across research, practice and education since 1995 with a commitment of over Rs 19 crores to the field, to ensure that the arts in all their diversity are nurtured and valued. The results of these engagements today are out there as books, films, archival material, performances, exhibitions, courses - touching, influencing and impacting lives every day. Some are ideas and imaginations still taking shape, waiting to be born. We believe that we have helped the creative process for the artists, giving a little boost to a fledgling thought here, a slight nudge to a question there and sometimes just by being there to support - so artists know that they are not alone in the world of their seemingly impossible dreams.

Some of what we have achieved over the years includes enabling those voices, stories and histories to be heard that otherwise may have been drowned by more dominant ones. After listening to stories of the jute mill workers in Sunil Shanbag's play *Cotton 56 Polyester 84*, when people step into the malls in Mumbai that are built on these mill lands, they will think differently about the history of their city. We have supported risk taking experiments that challenge established notions in arts practice. When Asakta Kalamanch, a theatre group in Pune adapted Martin Crimp's *Play Attempts on her Life* in Marathi, as *Tichi Satra Prakarane*, instead of one, they decided to work with four different young co-directors to enable different ways of seeing the 17 scenarios of the protagonist's life - making it a truly path breaking creative engagement in Marathi theatre. We have made possible alternative ways of not just preserving but revitalising our cultural heritage. So Mahmood Farooqui and Danish Hussain not only narrate the amazing stories from past repertoires of the 16th century storytelling form of *Dastangoi* but also create new contemporary ones and train young actors as *dastangos*. We have helped empower change makers within communities through the arts. Our Kali Kalisu trained teachers equipped with their learnings from the arts-based workshops serve in government schools across Karnataka today making classroom education more exciting, wholesome and relevant to the everyday lives of students. We have over the years built a body of knowledge that lies in various archives across the country as bedrocks for further enquiries - and this, not just in English, but in other Indian languages too. We have enabled platforms such as residencies, workshops and seminars where artists and scholars can meet, share, further their work and learn from each other. We have consistently and continuously shared the work of our grantees through

presentations, lecture demonstrations, festivals, publications and conferences across the country. And very recently with Project 560 in Bangalore we enabled new imaginations of the city's public spaces through performances thus opening up discussions on only on what the arts can do to energise a city but also at its very core, what could be the various definitions of the arts.

Yes, there have been many challenges over these 20 years, the most difficult one perhaps being raising funds for the arts. There are very few organisations and individuals who support the arts, even today. And among the many reasons for this that I have encountered over the years, I want to address today, the one that really stands out: "There is no social urgency to support the arts." I have been told. To me, however, social urgency seems to be the most crucial reason for supporting the arts! The arts give meanings to what we live for and empower us to explore ways of thinking for ourselves. It connects us through shared experiences - to question, resist, and build. An individual's struggle finds voices in many through the arts creating common spaces to imagine a collective future. The arts makes us human, makes us more. And if this is not at the root of all the other developmental goals that our society has, then empowerment will always be a guise for handouts.

Over the years IFA has seen many transformations within. Beginning a solitary voyage 20 years ago, today we have fellow travelers in the field - more and more of our work will be collaborative with institutions and collectives who share our passion, rigour and commitment. While we continue to make small seed grants incubating ideas, we are today also taking on larger projects with more widespread impact. Our programmes through consultations with the field are deepening their focus on critical research, practice and education remaining ever relevant to the aspirations of those we serve while at the same time provoking them to push the boundaries. We are attempting to take on the humongous task of building an archive of our work to make it accessible to students, scholars, researchers, artists and those interested in the arts. And these are just some of the tasks that lie ahead of us.

In the end I would like to emphasise: Given that the neo-liberal global policies are here to stay and strengthen, making the gap between people with and without privileges starker everyday; given that there will be no dearth of wars within and across nations in the name of religion, race, language and ethnicity; given that there is a growing intolerance of differences, a tendency to homogenize thoughts and practices; given that freedom of expression and liberty will continuously be at stake especially for marginalized groups, we will need to collectively think very hard about what role the arts must continue to play in our individual and community lives. We at IFA believe that this is where we find our critical position as facilitator, catalyst and provocateur in our collective expeditions of enquiry and imagination in the years to come. Thank you for being our fellow travelers.