

Theatre Infrastructure Baseline Study

Supported by the Sir Ratan Tata Trust

Conducted by the Theatre Infrastructure Cell

An India Foundation for the Arts and Navajbai Ratan Tata Trust Initiative

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March 2009

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Acknowledgment

This report is a culmination of the effort of researchers in the field (C. Annamalai in Tamil Nadu, Ekta Mittal in Karnataka, Robin Wahengbam in Manipur, and Yashaswini Raghunandan in Maharashtra) who have braved the pressures of time (and distance) in order to collect the data. Performance groups have been generous with their time despite their punishing schedules. We have tried to be faithful to the opinions and information that they have shared with us. The team at TIC and IFA has helped the process with their patience and supportive interventions. Thanks also to the TIC Steering Committee for useful comments and suggestions that have added to the overall value of this report.

Usha Rao
Senior Researcher

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

Explorations are often motivated by the hint of prior knowledge of ‘that’ which might be waiting to be discovered. Sometimes this knowledge is based on myth (such as the seaman’s tale of anatomical imperfections of ‘natives’ in distant islands) and sometimes on a definite ‘hunch’ like the one that brought Vasco da Gama to the shores of Kerala. Our enterprise, although far removed from the plundering exploits of seafaring explorers, shares some of their confidence of knowing ‘what is out there’ and the excitement of not being sure of the exact shape or form the ‘discovery’ might take.

2. Rationale and Objective

Although in today’s context theatre has established itself as a ‘serious’ performance art (that moves beyond pure entertainment) the material conditions under which it is produced are far from ideal. This is a fact that has been observed by theatre practitioners and others who engage with the performance arts in various capacities, and seems to hold true in general across the country. This relates to tight budgets, lack of funds, sometimes lack of updating of skills and infrastructural hurdles. Those who are familiar with theatre are aware that the presence of a performance venue is no indication that it is hospitable for staging a performance. While a quick glance at city’s cultural spaces profile might indicate a ‘healthy’ number of performance venues (that might suggest ‘good infrastructure’), the conditions under which they exist, the accessibility, availability and absence/presence of supporting infrastructure (lights, technical assistance for example) may be invisible to the casual viewer. TIC felt the need to launch a study that would specifically explore the infrastructural needs of contemporary performance groups in cities in order to uncover the details of ‘what is wrong’ and ‘what needs to be done’ about it.

3. Constraints and Limitations

In any qualitative study that hinges upon free flowing interviews, time becomes a constraint. The sample size had to be trimmed mid process in order to ensure that all centres were covered and interviews transcribed on schedule. In Mumbai, distances added to time lags. Often respondents were not able to make their appointment because of other engagements. ‘Life’ too intervened occasionally and blew the schedule off course.

Follow up and logistics added to the pressure of time. Quantitative data was not always forthcoming either because respondents did not have ready access to it or because it demanded extra time. This is true especially of Mumbai. In some cases, perhaps sufficient follow up was not possible given other demands of the study such as transcription of interviews and travel. For all the above reasons, quantitative data in this study is representative of trends and does not allow for generalizations as the sample is small and sometimes the data scanty.

The qualitative data needed to be sifted for its relevance to the objectives of the study. It presents variations in responses which cannot be ironed out to present a ‘larger picture’ as this

would not do justice to the particulars of each case and circumstances. However, it has been collapsed wherever possible.

4. Summary of the Report

This report of the Baseline Study on Theatre Infrastructure primarily documents the infrastructural needs of contemporary theatre groups in 10 cities within the states of Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Imphal in Manipur. It is a distillation of the data that has been recorded primarily through focused interviews with them.

Scope

The study initially included **contemporary theatre and dance** within cities across four states. We only included groups who regularly use auditoriums and halls for their performance. Although street theatre may be a vibrant contemporary form, we did not include groups that solely produce street plays in the sample. The research was intended to address the needs of performance groups that do not fall into the category of ‘commercial’ theatre. Although this genre of theatre has a strong presence in Mumbai, Pune and to some extent in Chennai, their needs and constraints differ from the non-commercial contemporary groups. Although contemporary groups may show a high degree of professionalism in their approach, some of are often compelled to limit their exploration of performance canvas as well as the expression of it due to infrastructural constraints. It is their needs that this study wished to address. The inclusion of the cities in three tiers is also in order to allow us to understand the differences in challenges and demands on infrastructure in cities of different scales, sizes and cultural histories.

Research Process

The Team

The research was led by the Senior Researcher who worked closely with the TIC at IFA. The primary responsibility for guiding and monitoring the team, analyzing the findings, and preparing the final reports rested with the Senior Researcher.

Associate Researchers in each of the four states were responsible for data collection. This included identifying performance groups, identifying persons within them, establishing contact, administering questionnaires, conducting interviews and translation / transcription and recording of interviews.

Tools

A master list of contemporary performance groups was prepared at each city with the help of theatre practitioners and institutions. A sample that proportionally represented the mix of languages in each city was selected. Within the selected groups, directors, actors, technicians and production persons were identified in order to invite a variety of perspectives. As far as the contemporary dance groups were concerned, there were very few groups in Bangalore, Mumbai and Chennai. Therefore, they have been referred to as a ‘foot note’ in the study.

The tools used were-

- Questionnaire/Table for quantitative data (e.g. number of performances over the past 10 years, expenses under various heads such as hall/venue, lighting, sound, rehearsals, etc.)

- Guided in depth interview (60-80 minutes) that explored infrastructural needs, as well as practitioners' perceptions of role of performance spaces and feedback on spaces most used/least used by groups.

Representation of Data

1. Quantitative Data Charts

- City wise/ tier wise chart that shows expenses under each head
- Performance tables (city wise) that show the number of performances over ten years.

Highlights: Quantitative Data

A word of caution while reading the quantitative data: since the tables (especially the performance tables) are put together with partially complete information, they may not be an accurate measure of either the number of performances or expenses. What the expense charts do present is an idea of relative distribution of expenses over the various heads. They also suggest a range over which expenses may be incurred.

The quantitative data should be read only in conjunction with the qualitative data sited from the interviews. The sample size is not large enough, nor is the information complete for it to present significant findings that can be used to draw a general picture on expenses.

However, there are some issues that the tables point to areas that can be explored further

- The expense tables give us a suggestion of the pattern of expenses in general. City-wise and tier-wise there are common trends in expenses that might reflect infrastructural lacunae. For instance, in Tier 2 and 3 cities, (especially in Tamil Nadu), the paucity of lights may be reflected in the high costs associated with lighting in these cities.
- It suggests the possibility of linkages between various expense patterns and theatre activity in a particular city, which can be further explored. For example, there has been an increase in performances in Bangalore (Kannada). As the cost of venue hire seems relatively lower than other cities in tier 1, the possibility of a link between the two may be explored. This might have an implication on the assumption that affordability of well equipped venues does have a positive effect on vibrancy of theatre activity.

Highlights- Qualitative Data

Unlike the case with quantitative data, the qualitative data presents an in depth and textured picture that covers a vast range of groups and their experiences. All of the above reflect 'reality' as perceived by the respondents, who are active theatre practitioners in these cities. The colloquialisms which persons have used to describe their experiences have also been reflected in the report. Therefore, terms that are used to describe specific needs (such as the need for 'coloured lights') have to be read by the theatre expert with some amount of translation into technical vocabulary. The seasoned theatre person/expert reader may have an intimate knowledge of some of the circumstances that practitioners face in the cities we have covered. Some of what is presented in the report may contradict with their own impressions. The data, however, are perceptions of our respondents and need to be seen as specific to their particular circumstances. To use a theatre aphorism, he/she may have to 'suspend disbelief' in order to get the most out of this report.

Since the time available for interviews was limited, as was the time for the entire project, we had to compromise on the details and depth of the data. The data does suggest trends, overlaps and commonalities while also pointing to differences. It does give us insights into the infrastructural needs of groups that can be explored further.

The larger picture

At the end of the research, we find that our understanding the particular details of infrastructural needs has deepened, and our knowledge of what constitutes ‘infrastructure’ for theatre practitioners has been widened. Our list which mentioned inputs such as lights, sound, green rooms, props, etc. has been stretched to include much more.

- **Physical Infrastructure-** Lights, sound, stage, green room, toilets, etc. The specifics in these areas vary in each city. For instance, in Mumbai and Bangalore under ‘lighting’ the needs are more in terms of updating, maintenance rather than availability. In Thanjavur, Solapur, and other tier 2 and 3 cities, availability is the issue as equipment is offered sourced from other cities. In Manipur and cities in Tamil Nadu appropriate and affordable venues are in shortage. For instance, many venues in these cities do not have lighting bars. The role played by toilets and green rooms in facilitating performance and making a venue ‘friendly’ has been flagged.
- **Knowledge and Skills:** Apart from the physical infrastructural elements that support performance, the role of knowledge and skills seems to be a crucial one. Technical skills in the area of light design, sound design, stage management, and craft related to props and sets, make up, are all seen as equally important aspects of infrastructure. Workshops for actors in voice, movement and other skills, technical skill training (area of lights, sound) are being sought by groups. This need is more intensely expressed in smaller cities (tier 2 and 3) but is also a concern in a city like Bangalore which already has established theatre groups. In Thanjavur and Madurai, the need for scripts and directors was added to the wish list.
- **Performance Spaces:** The supportive role played by spaces like Prithvi, Ranga Shankara, Sudarshan (Pune), and to some extent Natana (Mysore) in promoting ‘new’ theatre and providing affordable and well equipped venues, was loudly acknowledged across the board. They have become entrenched in the cultural life of these cities as ‘theatre places.’ However the need for affordable intimate spaces spread through the city has been articulated in tier 1 cities. Majority of the groups in cities other than Bangalore, Mumbai and to some extent Chennai, are ‘making do’ as far as performance spaces are concerned. The situation is grim in Manipur where even basics are hard to come by. The scenario in Madurai, Thanjavur and Chennai is slightly different. Here spaces are seen as necessary agents in promoting theatre by making it possible to have regular performances. They are expected to create a demand for theatre whereas in Manipur, they are filling a demand for space by theatre.
- **The Place of Space in the city:** The fact that theatre spaces have a dynamic relationship with production and performance is never disputed. But what is suggested in the conversations with practitioners is that most often this fact is given a backseat while planning or managing a performance space. Architecturally, spaces play a powerful role in the shaping of performances. Especially in cities that are dependent on single spaces (like the Hutatma Mandir in Sholapur or Museum Theatre in Chennai, Prithvi for some groups in Mumbai), performances are often designed keeping in mind the contours and eccentricities of the space. In certain cases, theatre venues have also ended up

disciplining and inhibiting theatre which has to confine itself to limitations of the venue. Theatre spaces which are designed to support contemporary theatre (as opposed to halls that can double up as music venues and wedding *mantaps*) are the ground on which work of theatre groups are expressed and shared with the public. The importance of theatre spaces that are designed for theatre by persons involved in theatre, in supporting performances has come through in all the conversations about spaces.

- ***Theatre friendly managements and programming:*** When theatre groups articulate the need for theatre ‘friendly’ managements, they are commenting on programming policies and the quality of their interaction with theatre managements. The perception of most groups is that managements are ‘commercial’ and don’t have any interest in theatre. Performance venues, despite their significant presence, remain inaccessible to some groups as they feel that their programming policies exclude them. Lack of transparency, inconsistent policies are the other ‘problem’ areas that have been identified. On the positive side, certain venues (like the Alliance Française Chennai) are favored because of the supportive attitude of managements, although they may not be ideal venues to perform at. Sudarshan in Pune, is appreciated for its active supportive stance – not only does it provide a quality space for performance, but also a nurturing environment.
- ***Rehearsal Spaces:*** Rehearsal spaces are the seed-beds in which a performance is germinated and nurtured. Therefore this is a concern for performers across all cities and has come through in conversations as an important requirement for supporting theatre. Groups by and large make do with pillared halls in schools, and venues that are cramped and sometimes inhospitable, with no water and toilets. Lighting rigs and provision for using sound are almost non-existent except in the case of venues that are owned by theatre groups.

Recommendations

One of the constraints imposed by the design of the study, which is an exploration into the particular experiences of theatre practitioners across different scales of cities, is that recommendations that apply broadly across the board do not seem possible. Funneling the data can end up erasing the differences in conditions, the variation in expectation from infrastructure, and the specific needs for groups in the different centres. A richer and more textured appreciation of specific areas for intervention may be gleaned from a close reading of the profiles and needs listed under each city.

However, going by the intensity of some responses and the suggestions made by the respondents, the following areas can be highlighted as ‘hot spots’ for possible intervention.

‘Hot Spots’

- ***Rehearsal Spaces:*** Refurbishment of theatre venues that are not in use in some cities, or support for groups that want to initiate a rehearsal venue. Apart from the provision for basic lights, sound and support facilities, there needs to be attention given to details that are essential for process and experimental work. These may be, for instance, provision for mirrors, surface that allows movement, etc.
- ***Upkeep of existing spaces:*** In some cities (Pune, Dharwad, Mysore, Bangalore) performance spaces that exist have fallen into disuse or have not been maintained. After identifying spaces that may be potentially used optimally, the feasibility of refurbishing some of them needs to be assessed. The plan for refurbishment needs to be fed by the inputs of theatre practitioners in the city. Care needs to be exercised in identifying the

agencies which would be responsible for the same as experiences in various cities have shown that this too has an impact on the efficacy of the intervention.

- *Intimate Performance Venues:* This is potentially a sound area for intervention across the board. In Mumbai the need is for spaces in the suburbs. In Bangalore, the suggestion is to have spaces in various ‘localities.’ In Chennai, Pune, and the tier 2 and 3 cities, this seems to be a dire need. Affordability (which encourages regular performances) and technical support seem to be the attributes that would make these spaces usable.
- *Technical Pool:* Given the paucity of technical know how that exists (including the short supply of light, sound, stage designers), workshops for design skills may be a possible avenue for intervention. But this would work only if there was a base infrastructure (in terms of lights, sound equipment and support facilities) at venues. Therefore, although there is an expressed desire in Madurai and Thanjavur, these may not be the best candidates for this intervention at the moment. Inputs on how to use existing technology optimally could also prove to be helpful.
- *Skills Updates and performance support:* Skills workshops for actors and directors maybe initiated, especially in the Tier 2 and 3 cities. In Thanjavur, Sholapur and Madurai where there is a need for scripts and fresh ideas that support experimental theatre, writing workshops may add vibrancy to the creative climate.

City-wise Interventions

Each city has its unique set of infrastructural needs that are crucial within their particular contexts. However, Chennai, Manipur, and tier 2 and 3 cities show a wide gap between infrastructural needs and availability. This is not to suggest that tier 1 does not warrant intervention: an initiative for a rehearsal space in Bangalore or Mumbai might contribute intensely to theater in these cities.

Thanjavur and Madurai present unique challenges. In these cities theatre is struggling to be accepted as an ‘art form.’ Writing workshops, festivals and other events might be one method of intervening and building a more appreciative base for theatre. Since theatre groups are in a more fluid state (where there is no visible presence of a defining theater movement), it might be possible to work collaboratively with the theatre community to come up with suggestions for interventions. This however needs to be explored on site as perceptions recorded in the course of an interview cannot always reflect the ‘complete picture.’

A word of Caution

While planning any intervention care needs to be taken to study the dynamics that exist between theatre groups, and between the theatre community and the city. While working with local partners, the following need to be kept in mind:

- Limitations of government agencies and bodies: our data shows that government (local/city) cannot be relied on to come through with infrastructural projects. Besides, the most neglected spaces are the ones run by government bodies.
- Limitations of theatre organizations and institutions: feedback on spaces that are run/ owned by institutions indicates that resources can end up becoming the exclusive domains of these groups. This may be due to the fact that they are constantly used (either for production or rehearsals) and therefore cannot be made available to others. Therefore, if collaboration with a local group/institution is being considered, it might need to include a broader section of the theatre community to ensure partnership and accessibility to resources.

- One needs to take into account that ultimately, the manner in which resources are accessed and used is also a function of power dynamics within a community. Often the most marginalized are also the least benefited. Checks against such a situation need to be collectively arrived at and agreed upon in order to maximize the beneficiary pool for any intervention in the realm of infrastructure.

The Way Forward

This study, as the name indicates, sketches a basic picture and rough possibilities for intervention. These are indicators that need to be pursued further in the form of more detailed study and data gathering. It would involve on-site research into the particular details of areas identified for possible intervention and the participation of the theatre community in coming up with an action plan. The intervention process, if perceived as a collaborative one, may itself begin to draw various groups into a synergistic body.

4. An after thought

The most adverse of conditions also happen to inspire our most creative moments. This is true of art forms in general and perhaps also applies to theatre. However, when adversity manifests itself in the larger social/political contexts of our lives, perhaps it would be superfluous to add infrastructural blocks to the mix that already exists!

This is not to suggest that merely taking care of infrastructural needs is all that is needed for theatre to grow and thrive. In attempting to dissolve some infrastructural hurdles, one may not in effect inject more life into the theatre community if there is none to begin with. Interventions may be undertaken with the consciousness that they are chipping tools that are working on extraneous blocks. At best, they may be supportive platforms for theatre that is waiting in the wings. It would be unrealistic to expect any intervention to initiate and maintain creative flows in theatre where there is no mother spring.

The base line study is a spring board for designing further initiatives for investigating potential areas for intervention that may play a supportive role in the life of contemporary theatre in our cities.

Chapter I: Introduction

I. Introduction to the Report

This report of the Baseline Study on Theatre Infrastructure primarily documents the infrastructural needs of contemporary theatre groups in 10 cities within the states of Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Imphal in Manipur. It includes perceptions about the current status of theatre in these cities, infrastructural needs, responses to the availability of theatre infrastructure and the articulation of infrastructural support required for groups to maximize their potential. All of the above reflect ‘reality’ as perceived by the respondents, who are active theatre practitioners in these cities. The report is a distillation of the data that has been recorded primarily through focused interviews with them.

II. Scope and Rationale

The study initially included **contemporary theatre and dance** within cities across four states. We did not include folk performers or classical dancers in the sample as their needs may be different from the contemporary forms of dance. We also only included groups who regularly use auditoriums and halls for their performance. Although street theatre may be a vibrant contemporary form, we did not include groups that solely produce street plays in the sample.

Given the broader sociological scenario, cities are projected to grow at a tremendous pace over the next decade. The weight of the population in this country is expected to shift significantly into urban centres. The demand for cultural spaces where different forms of cultural expression can flower is also expected to increase. The inclusion of the cities in three tiers is also in order to allow us to understand the differences in challenges and demands on infrastructure in cities of different scales, sizes and cultural histories.

Initially, we had included Uttar Pradesh in the sample. Due to mid process hurdles in the field, we moved to Manipur as an alternative, given the richness of performance arts in this area. The four states have given us the opportunity to map performance arts activity across regions. The presence of Tata Trust grantees in these states enabled us to prepare case studies to document the ways in which they have addressed the challenges in the area of performance infrastructure.¹

III. Research Process

1. The Team

The research team consisted of a Senior Researcher and four Associate Researchers. The research was led by the Senior Researcher who worked closely with the TIC at IFA. The primary responsibility for guiding and monitoring the team, analyzing the findings, and preparing the final reports rested with the Senior Researcher.

Associate Researchers in each of the four states were responsible for data collection. This included identifying performance groups, identifying persons within them, establishing contact,

¹ This however, is not part of the main body of this report.

administering questionnaires, conducting interviews and translation / transcription and recording of interviews.

2. The Target Group

In each city, a complete list of performance groups (contemporary theatre and dance) was drawn up. The terms ‘performance’ and ‘groups’ were defined as follows.

- **‘Performance’**: in this context refers to theatre and the movement arts because we feel that these two categories have the most complex needs in terms of performance infrastructure. We focused on performance groups that require and use modern infrastructure as this is the area of concern for the TIC.
- **‘Group’**: can be any collective that consists of three or more people. Groups can be registered or informal, professional or amateur.

From the master list of groups in each city, a proportionally representative number of groups were chosen on the basis of language (English, Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, etc.) and type of performance (theatre or dance). Within each group, people who perform different roles were interviewed (director, male actor, female actor, production / backstage etc) in order to include a spectrum of functionaries in the groups and their experiences.

3. The Respondents

Cities/ Towns	Nos. interviewed
Maharashtra	
Tier 1: Mumbai	27
Tier 2: Pune	5
Tier 3: Sholapur	4
Karnataka	
Tier 1: Bangalore	24
Tier 2: Mysore	8
Tier 3: Dharwad	5
Tamil Nadu	
Tier 1: Chennai	31
Tier 2: Madurai	10
Tier 3: Thanjavur	6
Manipur	
Imphal	16
TOTAL	136

4. The Method

We felt the need to use qualitative research approaches for this study. There are several areas in this research that would require extensive probing and this would only be possible with the use of qualitative research tools (for example, individual's perception of what constitutes 'poor infrastructure'). Quantitative data was collected in the first part of the questionnaire. It was confined to more definitive and discrete information heads such as number of performances, average expenses in various areas of performance.

The needs of performance groups were assessed using a combined questionnaire-interview format. The questionnaire broadly covered factual details about the group. It also captured details of expenditure on different aspects of infrastructure.²

The in-depth structured interview included questions that probed the rationale of preferences of certain spaces over others, perception of infrastructural needs, responses to existing spaces and infrastructure that is available to groups, and suggestions for areas that need to be remedied. Perceptions of 'ideal' spaces were included to have an insight into the 'fantasy' space of groups. The data has given us some insights into what practitioners need in a performance space and what policy and programming issues they face with regard to the same. Flowing from this is the identification of the most crucial areas as well as possible points for intervention.

IV. Representation of Data

1. Quantitative Data Charts

- City wise/ tier wise chart that shows expenses under each head
- Performance tables (city wise) that show the number of performances over ten years.

Rider

Researchers often managed to garner an interview slot of 60- 80 minutes with great difficulty in some cases. The interaction was compressed as a lot of ground needed to be covered. Although data tables were sent ahead in advance, not all of them came back filled out. Sometimes, directors/ actors were not able to access data about performances over the past ten years. This appeared as gaps in the data. Similarly, expense tables, especially in Mumbai, have not always been completed. A word of caution while reading the quantitative data: since the tables (especially the performance tables) are put together with partially complete information, they may not be an accurate measure of either the number of performances or expenses. What the expense charts do present is an idea of relative distribution of expenses over the various heads. They also suggest a range over which expenses may be incurred.

2. Qualitative Data

The bulk of the data has been gathered through in-depth interviews with theatre practitioners from various groups. Most significant observations in each city, shared concerns as well as unique experiences in various areas of performance were sifted from the interview reports and compiled into this report. The data has been presented as follows:

² See Annexure A for questionnaire.

A. Summary of Findings

Findings under each city, grouped tier wise. The findings have been classified under various headings such as most used spaces, list of infrastructural needs, areas that need attention, rehearsal spaces, ideal spaces, etc. The headings may vary from city to city because in some cases there is no substantial data to represent under a particular head. For example, ‘compromises’ may not figure under every city, or ‘what makes a venue attractive.’ In some cases where there are few spaces to choose from some of these headings have become less relevant and have been left out. In the case of Mumbai, where the sample was large (and therefore the data base large), some of the infrastructural needs have been presented in a bullet form. This is merely to avoid obvious descriptions and repetitions, as these needs have been discussed at length elsewhere in that section.

B. Insights

The significant insights overall as well as from the tier 1, tier 2, tier 3 cities and Manipur.

C. Recommendations

Possible areas for intervention have been highlighted.

3. A Note on Representation

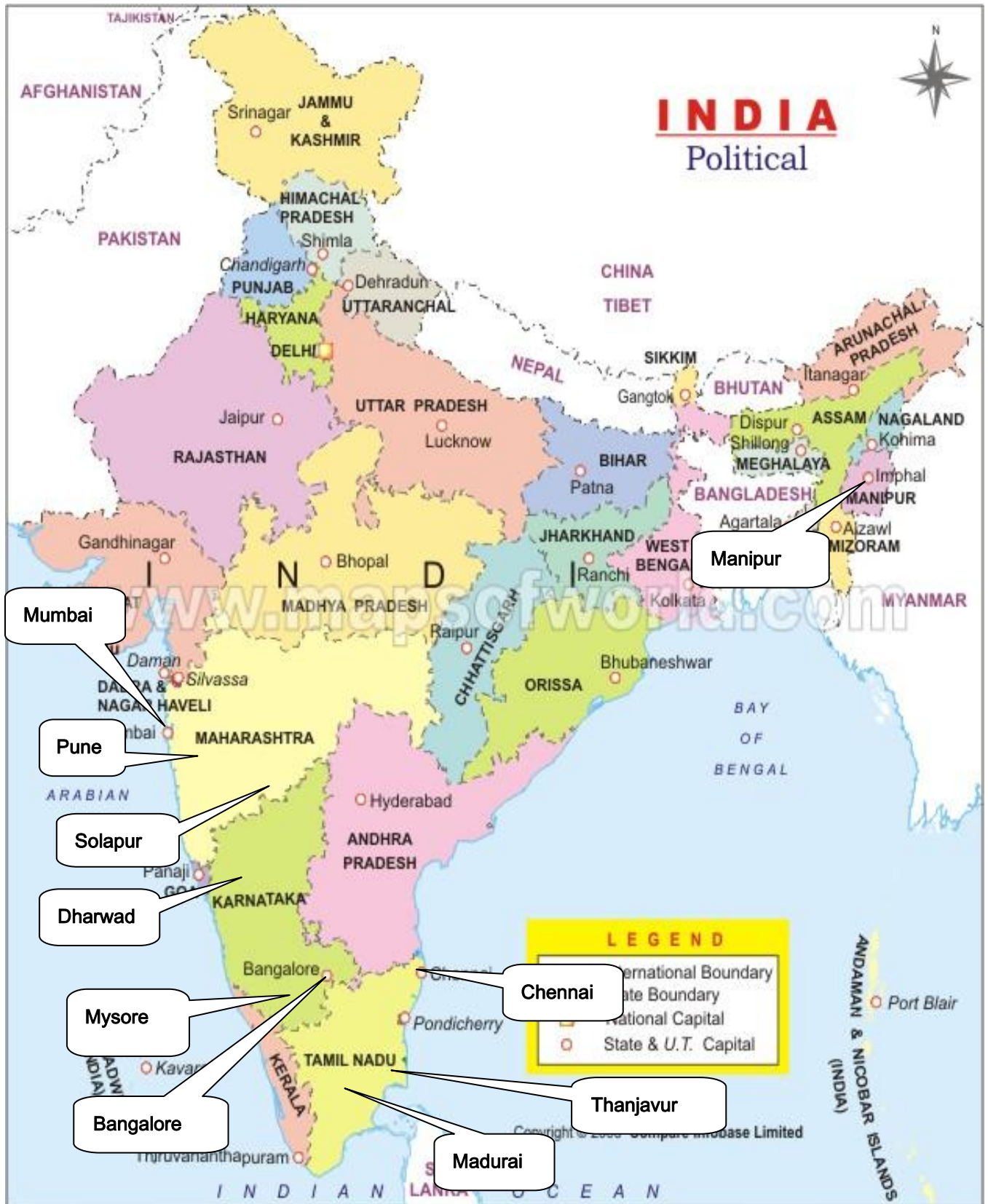
While representing the findings from each city, and in the presentation of insights, the conscious decision has been made not to funnel all the information to arrive at a ‘general’ and ‘quick’ understanding. Nor is there an abstract of findings in this report. The nature of the data is specific and often repetitive, but the contexts in which it is produced vary from situation to situation. This is not only across cities but also within cities for different groups. When English groups in Bangalore mention that a particular venue is ‘inadequate,’ the context for this comment is different from a Kannada group’s observation that the same venue is ‘ideal.’ One does not nullify the other. Therefore there is an attempt to maintain as much detail as is practical within this report so that the textures of experiences are not erased.

Rider

The process of reading and analysing the data was as ‘subjective’ as was the production of the data base, given that it is a collection of individual’s subjective perception of infrastructural needs. However, care has been given to note the frequency with which certain responses recur across a particular city as well as the entire sample. The intensity with which certain responses have been phrased or communicated has also been taken into account. Since the research does not mine any of these areas in depth, and given the limitations of the study in terms of time and scope, the report has favoured the more tentative approach to recording findings and arriving at conclusions. Anonymity of respondents has been maintained.

Since the time available for interviews was limited, as was the time for the entire project, we had to compromise on the details and depth of the data. However, it does give us insights into the infrastructural needs of groups that can be explored further.

V. Location of Study



Chapter II: Highlights of Findings

Observations on Tables

1. Limitations

Data on the number of productions, in general, is ‘incomplete.’ It has been sketchy in some cities (Sholapur, Bangalore – English groups, for example) and absent in Mumbai (apart from IPTA). In most cities, not all the groups that were interviewed have shared their production and expenses data. This is probably a function of the difficulty in accessing performance data by groups. Or perhaps it also suggests that a more tenacious follow up is required given the fact that theatre persons are forever short of time, and sharing historical performance data may not always be their priority.

2. Reading the Tables

What the tables do suggest is the trend of performance growth overall in each city, over the past 10 years. Not all the groups that were interviewed have filled out the production tables. Many of those that have, the information is partial. Given that this data is incomplete, it cannot be used to establish a definite rate of growth for production. Our understanding of the mounting pressure on theatre infrastructure is drawn primarily from the qualitative data gathered in the interview process. The tables can be read as a reflection of production activity with respect to the groups. The data has to read along with the information gathered in interviews in order for it to have some significance.

PERFORMANCE TABLE ³												
City	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Chennai -Tamil/ English	4	5	6	6	12	13	26	21	20	20	16	0
Chennai -English	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	0
Bangalore - Kannada/English/Bengali	8	6	6	8	5	8	5	9	10	12	10	9
Madhurai- Tamil	7	8	10	10	6	10	13	14	15	15	16	5
Dharwad-Kannada	17	28	13	8	15	15	17	18	16	22	25	18
Thanjavur-Tamil	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	0	0
Pune-Marathi	0	0	0	5	5	0	0	35	34	99	24	1
Sholapur-Marathi	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	5	18	0
Manipur-Manipuri	20	22	19	16	16	16	24	16	33	20	16	0
Mysore-Kannada	6	6	7	10	10	9	12	14	12	16	16	16

³ Note: The performance table taken with respect to the Language of performance from the year 1997 to 2008. The first language mentioned is the language taken into account

Tier 1

Performance Table : Tier I - Mumbai, Chennai, and Bangalore												
MUMBAI												
Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
No. of performances in Hindi	(Insufficient Data)											
CHENNAI												
Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
No. of performances in Tamil/English	4	5	6	6	12	13	26	21	20	20	16	9
No. of performances in English	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	0
BANGALORE												
Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
No. of performances in Kannada/English/Bengali	8	6	6	8	5	8	5	9	10	12	10	9

In Chennai, as the number of production tables from English groups is minimal, one cannot use the table to draw any comparisons between English and Tamil groups. Both sets of groups, however, do show an increase in performance that is gradual. As far as Bangalore is concerned, the number of performances of Kannada groups seems to have significantly increased, especially 2005 onwards. This may be due the fact that many of them could ‘afford’ to perform at Ranga Shankara. It also reflects the observations made by some respondents that performances have increased over the recent years, partly due to the availability of an affordable venue like Ranga Shankara. Production tables for English groups are in complete and therefore cannot be used for any analysis.

Tier 2

Performance Table : Tier II - Pune, Madurai, and Mysore												
PUNE												
Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
No. of performances in Marathi					5			35	34	99	24	1
MADURAI												
Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
No. of performances in Tamil	7	8	10	10	6	10	13	14	15	15	16	5
MYSORE												
Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
No. of performances in Kannada	6	6	7	10	10	9	12	14	12	16	16	16

In Madurai, performances seem to have significantly increased (doubled) 2003 onwards. This is despite ‘the hostile’ conditions that groups have reported in terms of infrastructure and other forms of support. Here again is an indication that infrastructural interventions could enhance the quality of productions and also encourage more productions overall. Mysore productions have more than doubled compared to the numbers in 1997. On an average, productions per year seem to be three per group, which is more than Madurai. Pune, the other Tier 2 city has shown a dramatic growth over the years. This is consistent with the picture that emerged in the qualitative data. This is particularly significant given that these numbers reflect the work of a small sample of groups in Pune. Overall, we may surmise that productions and performances place a heavy demand on infrastructural support in this city. There is a theatre resource crunch in terms of technology (lights, sound), costumes and other support that does not match the level of activity. This has come through in the depth interviews. Enhanced infrastructural support may be very welcome in this theatre rich environment, and might expand the experimental canvas for many groups.

Tier 3

Performance Table : Tier III - Sholapur, Thanjavur, and Dharwad												
SHOLAPUR												
Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
No. of performances in Marathi						1		1	1	5	18	
THANJAVUR												
Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
No. of performances in Tamil				1	1	2	2	2	1	1		
DHARWAD												
Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
No. of performances in Kannada	17	28	13	8	15	15	17	18	16	22	25	18

The Thanjavur numbers are very low, which is also supported by the information shared by the groups. In Sholapur, the table suggests that each group on an average has at least two productions per year. This indicates a fairly active theatre scenario which corroborates the impression we have gathered from the depth interviews. In Dharwad, the number of productions over the past 5 years have averaged between 3 and 5 per group, per year, which indicates a ‘healthy’ state of activity for contemporary theatre. In their interviews, practitioners were pessimistic about the state of theatre (both professional and amateur). Read together, the data suggests a growing presence for theatre and a potential that practitioners feel is yet untapped. Given a more supportive environment, theatre may find a new level in this city.

Manipur

Performance Table : Manipur												
Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
No. of performances in Manipuri	20	22	19	16	16	16	24	16	33	20	16	

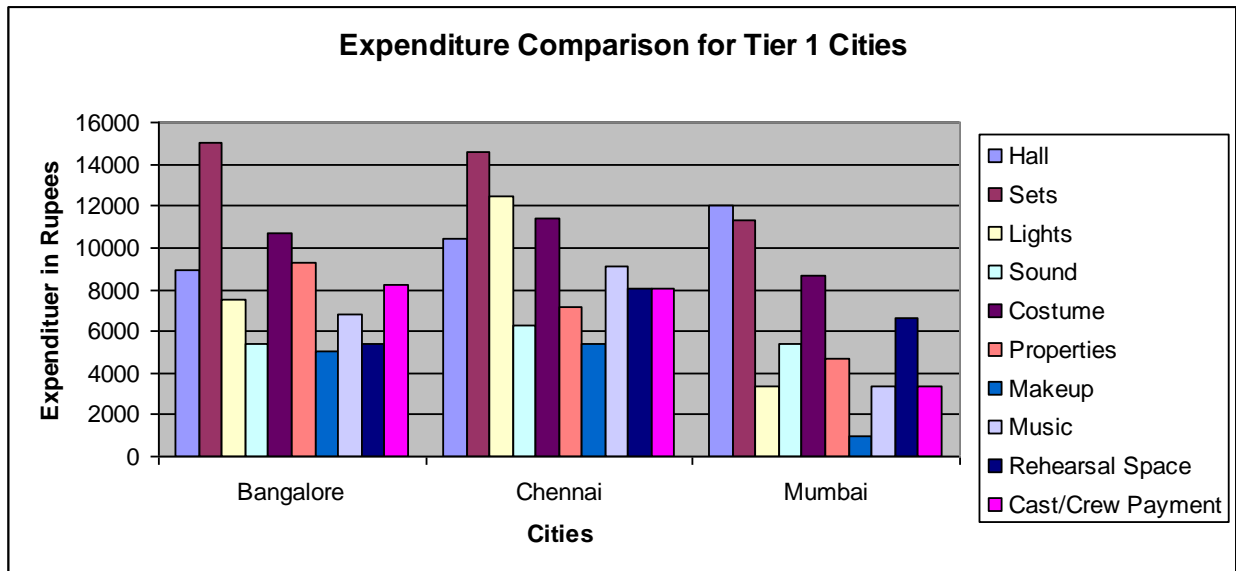
Only 10 groups of the 15 that were interviewed have shared their production data. On the basis of this limited information, it seems that productions have dipped since 2005. Over the past two years, on an average, each group seems to producing between 1 and 2 performances.

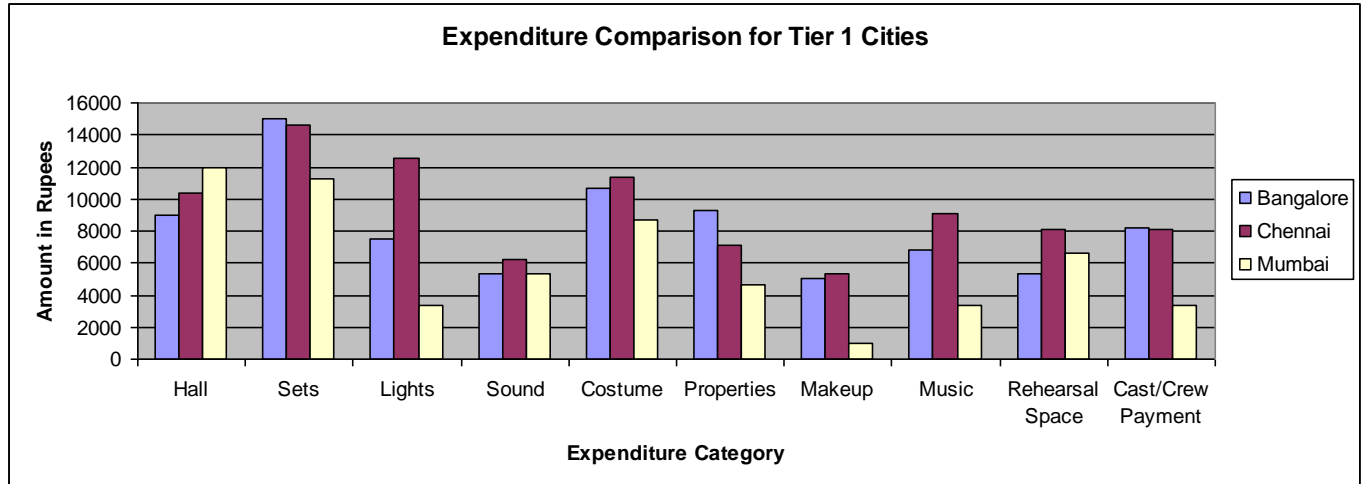
3. Production Expense Tables

Like the performance tables, the production expense sheets are for the most part incomplete. There are no comprehensive expense tables in the Mumbai sample. Expenses relating to halls/venues that have appeared as part of the interview narrative have been included in the body of this report.

The figures provide an estimate of expenses within a range. To this extent they also show us the relative expense picture in the three tiers and Manipur. Low expenses need not necessarily suggest the presence of affordable and subsidized facilities. It may reflect tight budgets which are a function of lack of resources, or the limited (but low cost) access to less than ideal infrastructural facilities, that groups are forced to use in the absence of available alternatives. For instance, these may be government subsidized halls with poor light and sound facilities. The tables therefore need to be read in the context of the larger picture – the profile of the city and the interview data.

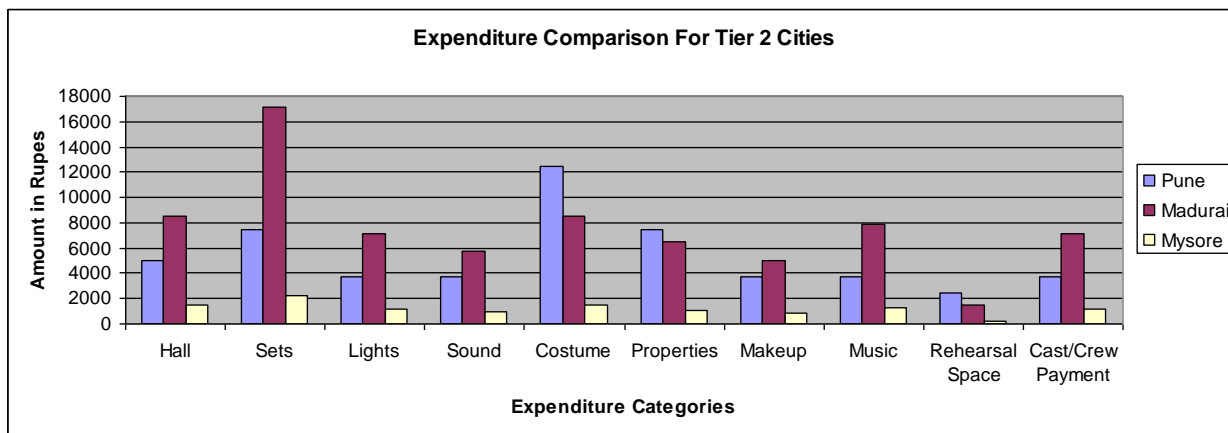
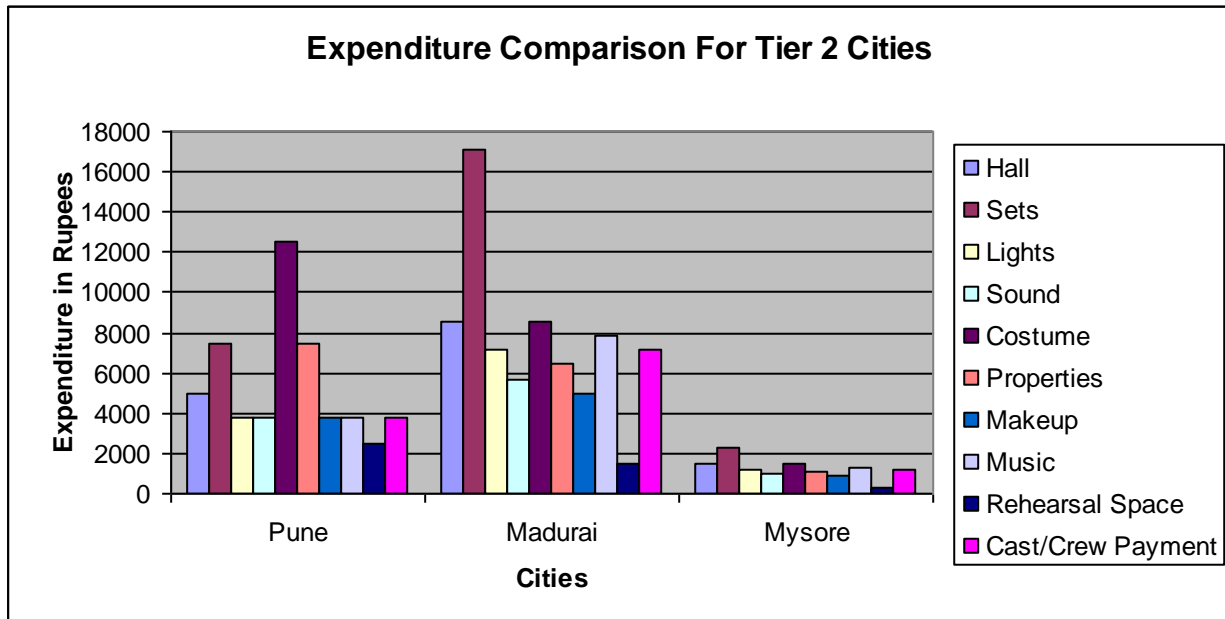
Tier I





- Mumbai expense tables are incomplete. The expenses appear lower than the other two cities when in fact they are probably higher. Even within the limited scope of the information available to us, the venue figures for Bombay are the highest for tier 1.
- Most expenses are comparable as far as Bangalore and Chennai are concerned. Venue charges are higher in Chennai. This is consistent with the fact that Bangalore groups who perform at Ranga Shankara spend less on an average.
- Venues (halls) and sets seem to be uniformly at the higher end for all cities.
- Significantly, lighting is a larger expense in Chennai given that most venues are not equipped with lights.
- Within the overall expense profile, in each city, rehearsal expenses range from approximately half to 2/3 of the hall cost. This is also reflected in the feedback on rehearsal spaces across the tier. Among the three cities, Bangalore seems to be spending the least for rehearsals. The presence of a subsidized space in Ravindra Kalakshetra and in the mini halls in South Bangalore (Subanna Hall for example) probably ease out the expense for some groups.
- Set costs are significantly higher than hall/venue costs in all cities. The cost of wood, the shortage of designers and the high demand for carpenters in the construction industry, could have pushed these costs up. This also points to the need to share, recycle and store sets as suggested by some groups. It corroborates the fact that minimalist productions are sometimes dictated by budgets rather than design.
- In Bangalore the cast and crew payments almost equal hall expenses. This may be read as an indicator of the ‘professional’ trend in theatre.

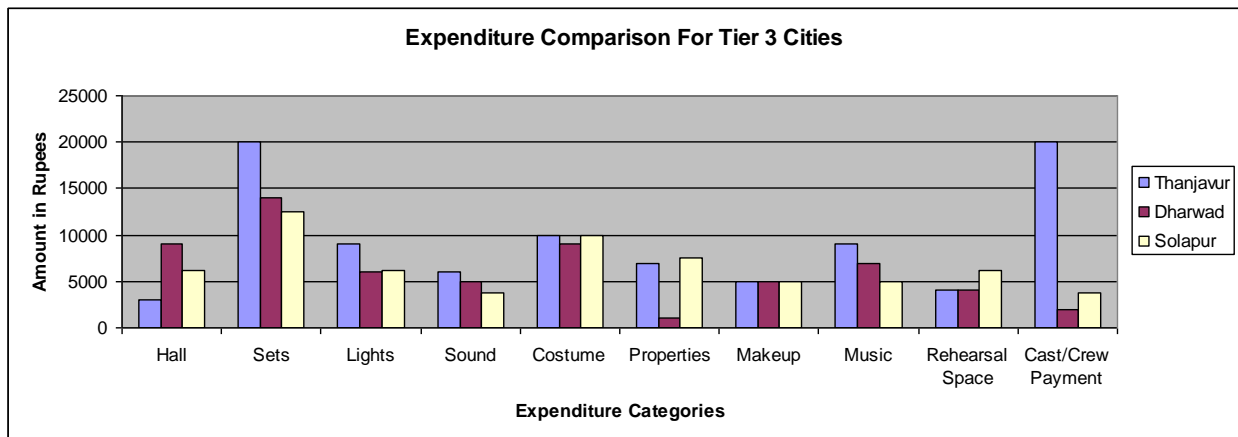
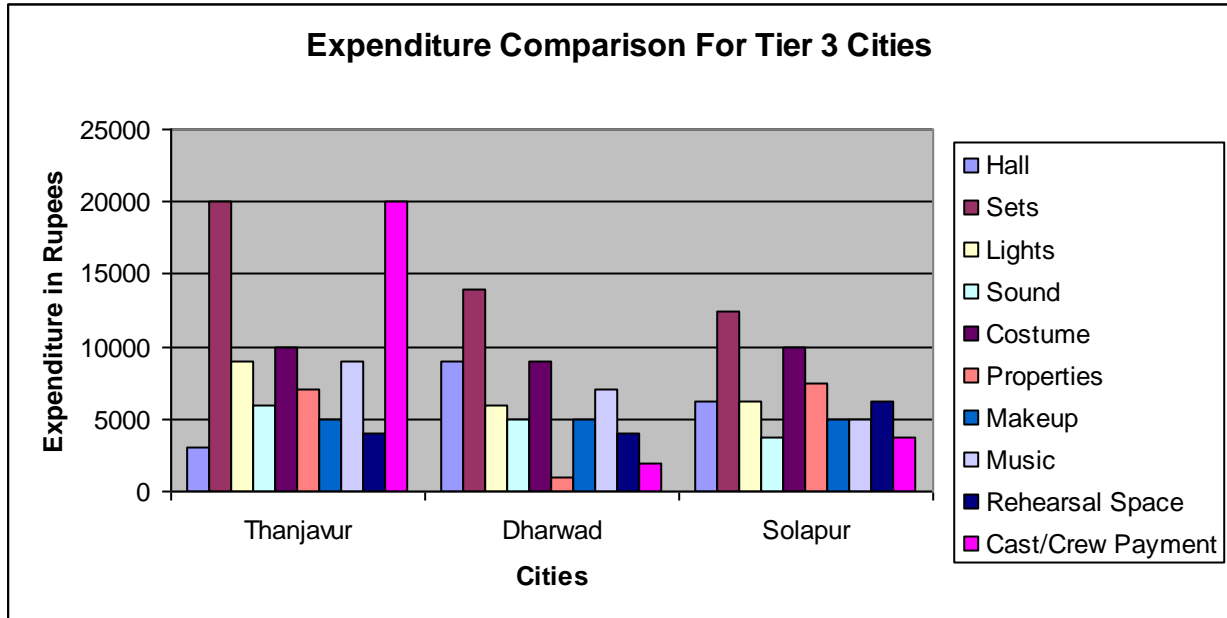
Tier 2



- Pune, which has the most active theatre scene compared to other cities in Tier 2 and 3, spends the least on hall hire. Perhaps this is indicative of availability of venues that are cost friendly, like Surdarshan. Or it might signal that groups largely have access to venues that are inexpensive, but with minimal facilities.
- Groups in Mysore seem to have the lowest expenses under all heads. These figures appear lowest in the entire sample (all cities taken together). It might be a function of low cost (but basic) performances venues such as Natana, Namana, which have played a role in increasing the number of productions by making it affordable for groups. However, this needs to be investigated as we cannot read much into the data as the sample size is small. Pune also spends the least on lights – some venues do come equipped with lights. Thanjavur, Madurai, Sholapur groups often have to source lights from outside, which makes it more expensive.
- The highest expense head (costumes) perhaps reflects the popularity of the historical play in Pune.
- Although the groups in Madurai show the least number of performances in Tier 2, they seem to have the highest expenses, under all heads. Considering the low number of productions, this table suggests that the cost of every production is more than double compared to Mysore. Scarcity of resources such as lights, the unavailability of

government run/ subsidized and equipped venues might add to expenses overall. Cast and crew is probably a bigger expense head as groups in Madurai lack the resources that are available in Mysore where Ninasam and Rangayana graduates are more apt to be available. Despite the heavy demand in media for actors, in Pune too cast and crew costs approximately half of what Madurai groups spend.

Tier 3



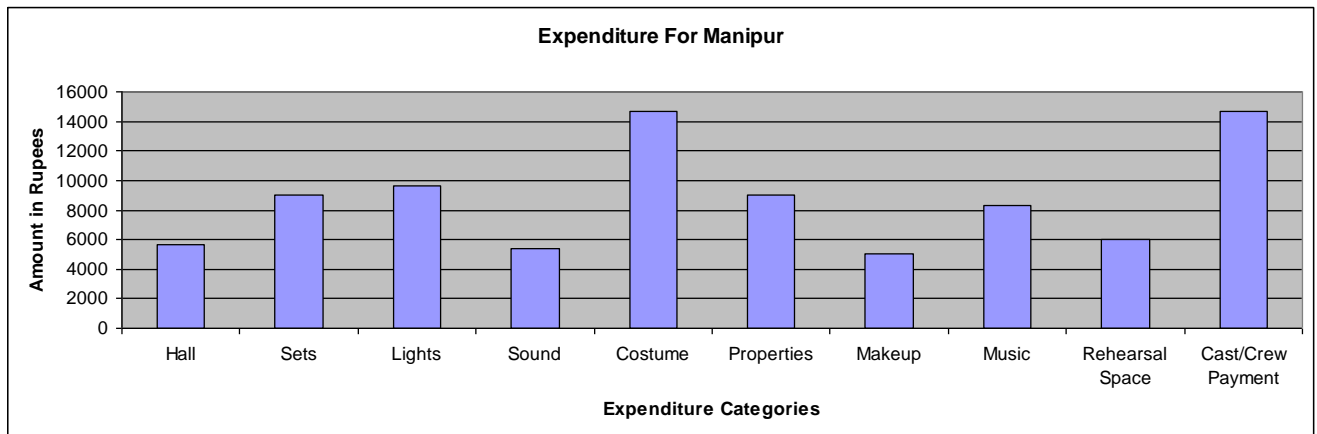
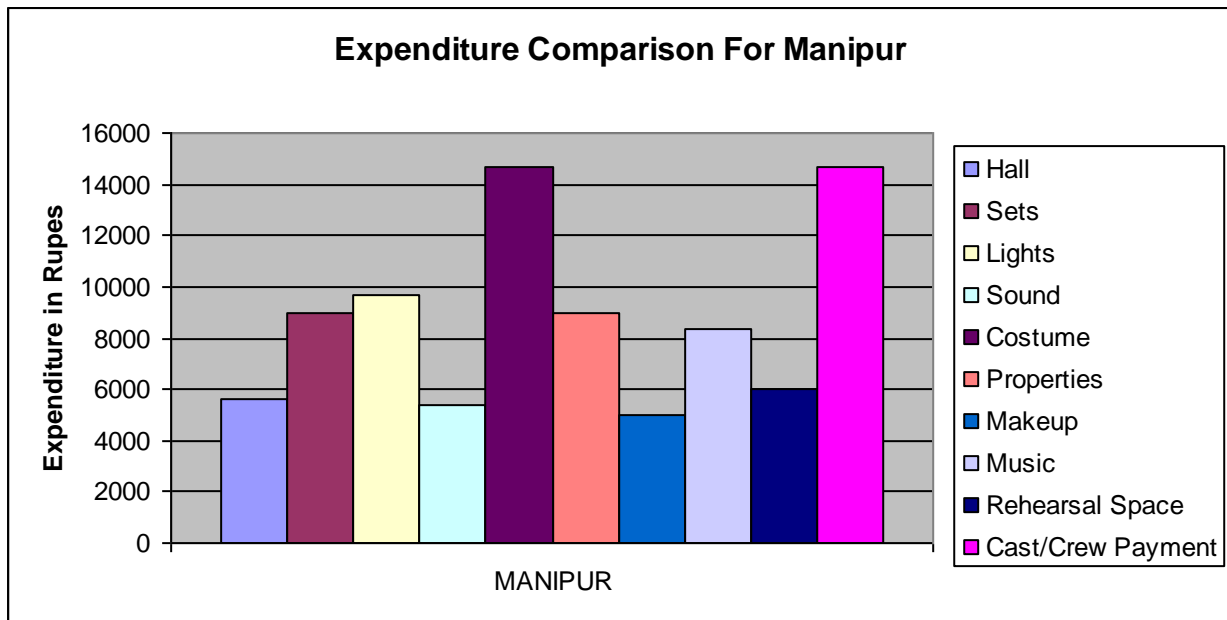
- The three cities Dharwad, Sholapur and Thanjavur seem comparable for most expenses, with Thanjavur having the highest expenses overall. This is interesting given the fact that Thanjavur also has, what appears like, more sporadic and leaner performance activity when compared to the other two cities.
- Cast and crew payments and sets are significantly higher in Thanjavur. This may be due to the shortage of actors – a fact that has been articulated in the interviews.
- The low quantum spent on cast and crew in Dharwad probably partly explains the flight of experienced actors into TV and film.
- Here too, like Tier 1, the largest expenses are in the area of sets.

- Sholapur, where historical plays are popular like in Pune, costumes expenses are higher than in other cities, and on par with Thanjavur.

Tier 2 and 3

- Thanjavur and Madurai, which report the least number of productions and a struggling contemporary theatre scene, lead the expense charts for tier 2 and 3 combined. Pune which is the most vibrant in this group has low expenses for many heads (except for costumes, properties and marginally, for cast and crew payments). The lowest, however, is Mysore.
- Rehearsal expenses are also low when compared to the tier 1 cities. Perhaps this is reflects the rental costs which are higher in metro cities.
- Cast and crew payments in Tamil Nadu are significantly high.

Manipur



- Relative to other expenses, cast and crew payments and costumes are higher than other expenses. Compared to other cities, it appears to be in the higher range, but lower than Thanjavur.

- Hall, sets, etc. are in the lowest range. In the context of Manipur, this might reflect the shortage of venues rather than the low cost of hiring particular venues. This may also hold true for lights, as there is a shortage of lighting equipment.

II. Summary of Findings City and Tier Wise

Tier 1

a. Mumbai

1. Profile⁴

Theatre and a wide spectrum of arts have been intrinsic to the life of Mumbai. The theatre scene (be it Marathi, contemporary English or Hindi theatre) is characterized by ‘professionalism’ and has produced some of the best talent in the country. Some of today’s practitioners are second or third generation theatre professionals. On the basis of thoughts gathered through the research and our collective understanding of the cultural pulse of the city, this portrait of the theatre scenario seems to be emerging.

There is bustling theatre activity – groups seem to be performing regularly (although they feel they ought to perform more). Although some Marathi and Hindi directors express their worry that they are losing audiences, one gets a sense of a dynamic atmosphere which keeps practitioners fully engaged with theatre. Events like Thespo, Prithvi’s Writers Block add to the vibrancy by helping to put more plays into the arena.

Our sample was spread around three distinct genres – English Theatre Groups (Theatre Company, Poor Box Productions, The Company Theatre, etc.), Marathi groups (some senior and well established directors) who are producing contemporary/experimental plays (Waman Kendre, Aawishkar, and others), and contemporary Hindi groups (3rd Bell Productions, Manav Kaul, IPTA, Arpana, and others). We also spoke to one Malayalam one Kannada group.

The ‘regional’ language groups (Kannada, Malayalam, and Marathi) feel that they have lost their older audiences, which has also impacted the ability of groups to sustain their activity. For instance, Kala Bharati claims that Kannada groups have dwindled from 50 to one (themselves) over the years because their audiences have moved into the suburbs. According to one senior Marathi director, audiences were drawn heavily from the old working class located in and around central Mumbai. With the change in employment profiles, and the deindustrialization of the heart of the city, the demographics have changed, with the ‘old’ moving into the suburbs. The preferences and cultural consumption patterns of the ‘new’ seem to be inclined more towards the commercial forms.

Some theatre persons (directors, actors, light designers) seem to straddle both the amateur and commercial worlds. While the Hindi and English groups seems to intersect in terms of audience,

⁴ The data is drawn for contemporary theatre groups. Contemporary dance groups could not be included as the researcher could not have access to them.

venues performed at, level of ‘professionalism’ and other attributes, the Marathi groups occupy a different niche. This plays out in the kinds of venues that are used, the locations of these spaces, the audience that they draw, and their level of ‘tolerance’ of technical gaps in venues. This is perhaps a function of the kind of theatre they are engaged with as well as their limited access to the better equipped theatre spaces. Given the spread of the metropolis, theatre activity too spills over into the suburbs and even to multiplexes (although with less intensity).

Coming through in the conversations is a sense of professionalism in the amateur theatre scene – their approach to funding and budgets (both of which they seem to have access to), the fulltime nature of their work (most of them do not hold other jobs, if they do, they tend to be in media), established support systems (hiring of storage space, contracts for rehearsal spaces), etc. Although many are engaged in workshops, they don’t seem to be their mainstay as it is in Bangalore or Chennai or other cities.

2. The Perception of Infrastructure

Groups in Mumbai are not working with the same kinds of constraints that other cities are. There are several more venues (still inadequate for the size of Mumbai, they feel), equipped with lights and sound infrastructure (in some of the halls like Ravindra Natya Mandir they may be more of an ‘illuminative’ nature, dimmers may be old and panels badly maintained, but they do not have the constraints of a tier 2 or 3 city where there are no lights, no dimmers and sometimes no rigs. Bangalore too is different in this, as there are fewer well equipped spaces (there is Chowdiah Memorial besides Ranga Shankara and Ravindra Kalakshetra) whereas Mumbai has Andrews, Sophia, TATA, Prithvi and NCPA.

There is a keen interest in building and sustaining audiences. The role of theatre spaces in helping to build an audience base (as demonstrated by Prithvi) is recognized as important by all.

3. Most Used Venues

Prithvi

NCPA

Andrews

Sophia Auditorium

Shivaji Mandir

Karnataka Sangha

Sahitya Sangh

Mysore Association

Probodhan Thakeray Hall

Ravindra Natya Mandir

Within the non commercial/ amateur circle, the use of performance venues appears to be tied to the language in which they perform. Marathi theatre groups prefer to perform in the Shivaji Park/ Dadar areas (Shivaji Mandir). The Malayalam group we interviewed (as well as the Kannada group) restricts their performances to Karnataka Sangha in Matunga.

Prithvi and NCPA seem to be shared between the Hindi and English groups as favorite venues.

One of the senior Marathi directors mentioned that location of theatre spaces impacts audience draw in Mumbai. Despite its appeal to theatre goers, Prithvi, it is felt, does not draw a Marathi audience. The distance demands that performers locate their shows in accessible locations. IPTA which performs in Hindi, has also moved to the suburbs (Mulund) for their performance as they believe that building an audience is more of a priority than using a well equipped theatre.

4. What makes some Venues Attractive

“Our theatres need a bypass surgery and not cosmetic surgery” (Lighting designer, Mumbai)

- *Basic infrastructure:* sound, light, green rooms and dressing rooms and toilets.
An overwhelming majority of the theatre practitioners felt that the best equipped spaces were Prithvi and NCPA as they provided facilities and more. This is crucial for groups as their expense heads increase if they have to hire equipment to rig up the venue for their performance.
- *An empathetic and theatre friendly management.*
Prithvi is again seen as the only space that has a management that is aware of the needs of theatre groups. Most other managements are seen as ‘indifferent’ at best or ‘commercial’ at worst, where performance venues are revenue generating spaces rather than nurturing nodes for theatre. State/municipal owned spaces are perceived as the worst managed and maintained.
- *Cost and location*
For the sole Malayalam group that featured in this study, budgets dictate the space that they choose to perform in. A basic proscenium, basic lights and sound and location make Karnataka Sangha attractive to them, despite the fact that their audience may be in far flung suburbs. The Marathi Sahitya Sangha (non commercial group) prefers Sahitya Sangh as they have converted the basement into a rehearsal space.
- *Symbolic and cultural value*
Prithvi’s draw is more than the sum of its infrastructural amenities. It is associated with the heart of theatre in Mumbai (for the English and Hindi groups) and is invested with the significance of being a theatre hub. To perform in Prithvi or be present at the theatre is to be part of this pulse. The pressure on Prithvi to host performances and the frustration of groups who are not able to get dates there is also a function of its symbolic value.

5. What makes Venues Unattractive

- Design: ‘Gadkari is built for audiences- plush interiors but no wing space, no depth to the stage, no backstage facilities and poor acoustics.’
- Poor amenities- toilets, green rooms, backstage, etc. (most spaces except NCPA, Prithvi, Andrews, TATA)
- Lighting inadequate or poorly maintained (Ravindra Natya Mandir- light cabin is too high, poor light maintenance, Sophia- lights inadequate, NCPA- light boards have pests)
- Unfriendly attitude of management (NCPA- commercial in approach and not supportive of theatre, no dates for Marathi groups. Ravindra Mandir- not open to non Marathi groups.
- Rentals too high (Andrews)

- Proscenium stages build for commercial theatre (most venues where Marathi theatre is performed)

6. Infrastructural Needs

The perception of what is needed to enhance infrastructure seems to be a function of the group's/ person's exposure to the potential and possibilities that various inputs like lights, sound, space, etc. have in designing a performance. The perception of infrastructural needs range from basics (green rooms, toilets) to the placement of lighting cabins and rigs, paucity of technicians, the need for safety, etc. Although rehearsal spaces are not connected with performance venues directly, they have been mentioned by almost all groups as a crucial input in preparing a performance.

- *Rehearsal Space*

In the context of Mumbai, there is a dire need for affordable, accessible and equipped rehearsal spaces. One of the Marathi stage seniors captures the challenges faced by younger, amateur groups: “some amateur groups that I am aware of take buses from Flora Fountain till the last stop and back to read scripts. Previously they used to rehearse at street corners and gardens but now they have stopped as there no footpaths nor gardens.”

In his vision for an ‘ideal performance space’, one of the directors included the need for a large amphitheatre for rehearsals. The wish for rehearsal spaces to be tied in with performance venues has been echoed elsewhere, even in other cities.

A school has been taken on a yearly lease by the more well established IPTA (at the cost of Rs. 35,000 a year), while others use homes, terraces, multi purpose halls (that are rented out on a hourly basis), which have rentals of Rs.100 per hour. Halls rented by the larger venues like Gadikari, Dinnath Hall (Rs. 400-500 per shift) Natya Sankool, Tata (2000 for a 4 hr. shift), Kirtan Kendra (10,000 a month) are other venues. One of the better established English theatre groups spends upto 50,000 for rehearsal space. For a particular production, it cost them 10,000 a day as it involved moving the sets for a 10 day rehearsal stretch. Birla Krida Kendra (Chowpatty), NCPA, Habitat (near Prithvi at Rs.100 per hour) are other rehearsal spaces mentioned. Rehearsal space is available at Prithvi for groups that perform there. An established English group has rehearsed in an unused factory (Vita Tooth Brush Factory) at Mahalakshmi.

Most of these halls are out of reach for the smaller groups. One group (Malayalam) has rehearsed at Matunga railway station at the labour union office. As rehearsals need to be stretched across a minimum of month to two months, costs of hiring rehearsal spaces becomes considerable. In addition, given the distances in Mumbai, time and transport costs need to be factored in.

Some groups have converted basements into a rehearsal space, but this is possible only if there is part ownership right involved. Aawishkar is a classroom that has been refurbished with a lighting rig (8 basic lamps), extra points and seating for upto 50 people. The group uses its space primarily as a rehearsal venue, which allows them to use the funds in other areas of production. Kala Bharati, the only Kannada group that figures in our study, has been able to have access to the Karnataka Sangha campus for

rehearsal. This they see as a big plus as they have been able to open it up to other groups for a fee.

▪ *Lighting*

The attractiveness of venues (along the desirability scale starting from Prithvi, NCPA onwards) seems to be dependent on the lighting facilities that they are equipped with. Most venues seem to be equipped with lights- some have state of the art (South Mumbai venues, and Andrews, for example) while others may have basic facilities (Karnataka Sangha). Groups do not want to hire lights- rather they work with what there is. This is in contrast to the Tier 2 and 3 cities where most venues do not have lighting and even basic lights need to be hired or sourced from other cities.

However, depending on the level of exposure and extent of the canvas that informs directors/light designers, the perception of lighting facilities varies. The more experienced groups (Hindi and English) seem to have a demand for the development of light design skills, trained technicians and state of the art equipment. Some even have access to the latter. Other groups have responded more to the quality of the equipment, its upkeep and the need for technicians rather than comment on the need to develop the craft as an essential part of evolving a performance.

- Placement of lights and lighting cabin makes it difficult to use them. For instance, in
- Ravindra Natya Mandir, the cabin is on the third floor and difficult to reach. The operators also do not have a good view of the stage.
- Poor maintenance of lights/panels- even in a well equipped venue like NCPA
- Poor quality of dimmers, filters (in most venues other than the major theatre exclusive spaces like Prithvi, NCPA, Andrews, TATA, etc).
- Light technicians are not knowledgeable or skilled enough to handle state of the art equipment
- Need for light designers who can use lights to add another layer to the interpretation of the text. Most often there is ‘illumination’ and not lighting in performances.
- Groups that use venues other than Prithvi, NCPA, Andrews, need to hire lights according to their requirements.

According to one well established English director, the rigs in Prithvi can be improved. From the perspective of a seasoned light designer (who has worked with groups across the city, across genres), the boards in the ‘well equipped’ venues like NCPA and Prithvi take effort and time to get used to. Sometimes the technicians themselves are not familiar with their intricacies. He suggests some level of standardization in order to facilitate the optimum use of the available technology.

▪ *Basic Amenities*

Most of the regional language groups we spoke to felt that venues that they perform in have poorly maintained basic amenities like clean bathrooms, change rooms, and green rooms. In Ravindra Natya Mandir, not only are the basic facilities not maintained but the cloth covered wings make it difficult for the actors to move off stage. Most venues don’t seem to be designed for contemporary theatre. In addition, bad acoustics and poor maintenance of these spaces makes them uninviting and difficult to use.

7. *Comments on Managements*

By and large, managements and policies are seen as a hindrance to performance. The significant comments on management of spaces and their policies seem to be centered around:

- Lack of awareness of theatre in most venues (especially those that are patronized by Marathi groups)
- Commercial interests dominant all other concerns. This seems to be the case even for NCPA, which they feel is no longer an exclusive theater space as the management allows other events to be staged there.
- Venues generate revenue but do not build an audience. The exception here seems to be Prithvi. Managements, they feel, are not giving attention to programming and building an audience base.
- Internal checks (sometimes not transparent) even in the case of Prithvi management. Dates are refused, groups are filtered out, which perpetuates them as 'exclusive' spaces.
- Not enough attention is given to maintenance and upkeep of technical aspects of the venue. For instance, lights are poorly maintained in most, NCPA light panels are badly maintained and not staffed by trained personnel. Most halls (especially in the suburbs) have poorly maintained green rooms and toilets. Municipal/government managed spaces seem to be the worst maintained.

8. *Compromises*

- *Spaces*
 - Non commercial Marathi theatre and other language theatre groups (other than Hindi and English) seemed to be squeezed for choice. There is a perception that halls are oriented towards revenue generating commercial theatres. Given the relatively small budgets, their choice of venues is narrow.
 - Learn to cope with an unfriendly/ unhelpful management because the venue is attractive for reasons of economy and location. This was specifically so in the case of the Malayalam group that performs at Karnataka Sangha.
 - Venues that are typically used by these groups are poorly maintained: lighting equipment, stage, green rooms and toilets are below reasonable standards. According to a director "On the whole, Marathi theatre spaces are horrible."
 - IPTA too felt that groups cannot demand better infrastructure in some of the halls as there is a 'monopoly' situation. Managements would simply refuse them dates and hand over the space to another group that needs it, if they are seen as 'too demanding'.
- *Performance Design*

Since affordability is an issue, some groups (Marathi) keep costs low by using minimum props, lights, sets, etc. This seems to be the case for most groups. Lack of lighting equipment, improperly placed points for rigging, etc have led to compromises in the area of lighting design. The potential that a good lighting designer (with equipment) has to add a layer of interpretation to the script in the making of a production seems to be lost due to the unavailability of equipment and technical expertise. One group mentioned that it designs props keeping in mind ease of storage.

Amaya, a new Hindi group, designs its productions with Prithvi in mind as they have not been able to get dates in any other venue. Available spaces, therefore, do seem to have an impact on the design of a production

9. What needs Attention

▪ *Rehearsal Space*

This seems to be an area that needs support for most groups. The unavailability of suitable venues (which are equipped, hospitable) and the high costs of hiring those that are available seems to be an issue, especially for the less established/non commercial Marathi, Hindi and other language groups. English theatre groups seem to have built the expenses into the budget and do not appear to see it a major hindrance. However, all groups seem to be seeking creative ways to arrange a suitable rehearsal space- whether it is rehearsing in gardens, parks, or old factories.

Groups have also discussed the ‘nuisance’ of having to transport sets and people across the city for tech rehearsals. Given the distances in Mumbai, this significantly adds to the costs of production and eats into the energy levels of actors and crew.

▪ *Lighting*

The data points to the following concerns which go beyond lighting equipment.

- Groups are aware of the need to include lighting design as a dynamic partner in designing a production.
- There are few lighting designers who work across genres in the city. Many groups may not be able to afford their services. There is a need to provide inputs in this area to groups.
- Upkeep and maintenance of lights and lighting equipment seems to be a necessity in all venues. Some venues, especially those in central Mumbai and the suburbs seem to need more attention in this area.
- Trained and skilled technicians are needed at venues so that the optimum use can be made of equipment. This includes the better venues such as Prithvi and NCPA.

▪ *Intimate Performance Spaces*

“We want to perform everyday but there is a lack of space” (Director, Hindi group)

“What the city needs is a dozen Prithvis and St. Andrews...and they will all be houseful.” (Director, Gujarati theatre group)

These comments have been echoed by other experimental groups (working in English and Hindi) whose productions are crafted around spaces that are conducive to experimental work. There seems to be a rush for dates at Prithvi and NCPA and a long waiting period. Performers felt that there was a dire need for intimate theatres/black boxes. Most of the existing venues, although well equipped (like Andrews) they felt were not suited to ‘their kind’ of theatre. NCPA, as it restricts newcomers, did not fill this gap adequately. The need for intimate venues was also expressed by other groups. The venues for Marathi and other regional language performances are mainly proscenium theatres that are not suitable for more contemporary experimental work. In the case of Marathi groups, it is felt that Prithvi and NCPA will not draw their audience (because of

location, association with a different audience profile). The need here seems to be for exclusive Marathi-friendly spaces that are fresh, intimate and inspiring.

There seems to be some theatre that has moved to informal spaces (homes and terraces). Groups have also tried working in multiplexes. But these do not fulfill performers' need for a wider audience, and for being part of a theatre milieu that a space like Prithvi offers. There is a sense of creative energy waiting in the wings.

“We need more Prithvis”

Underlying this comment is the need for a supportive structure that Prithvi has become a symbol for. A policy for nurturing new groups (although restricted to English and Hindi), the workshops that produce scripts, a management policy that allows tech rehearsals and the its ability to generate and cultivate audiences are all seen as necessities for experimental theatre to thrive in Mumbai. This is in addition to its other attractions (quality light, sound, basic facilities, etc). Groups feel that many such theatres spread across Mumbai will help to sustain their work and build new audience.

- *Taking Theatre to the Suburbs*

“...our recent performances in Mulund and Thane were houseful. Due to transportation problems people prefer not to travel but there is a large audience...” (Director Kala Bharati, Kannada group).

The need for taking theatre to the suburbs has been expressed by many groups, especially those working in Marathi and other languages. The migration into suburbs of old audience bases and the potential to create ‘new’ audiences among the recent settlers, make this an urgent need for many. The fact that intimate and ‘ideal’ spaces like Prithvi are ‘out of reach’ of the groups and their audiences, either because their audiences feel they do not ‘fit’ into the ambience or because they do not have the opportunity to perform there, points to a need for smaller, ‘hospitable’ spaces in the suburbs. Groups hope that these spaces can nurture experimental theatre and provide a base for audiences and groups to come together.

10. Comments on Spaces

In Mumbai, performance spaces are expected to be nurturing grounds for theatre and the arts. This is woven through the comments on ‘ideal spaces’ and practitioners perceptions of venues like Prithvi. The need for building a community of viewers, who are essential for a thriving theatre scene, has been expressed by many. This role seems to be seen as an intrinsic part of the *raison d’être* of performance spaces. While practitioners make an emphatic demand for better facilities, upkeep and management, they also see the performance venue as a space which, due its intrinsic energy, draws performers and audiences together. Prithvi in the context of Mumbai, seems to fulfill this role as a facilitator in building a theatre movement through its policies/programming, facilities and ability to draw audiences. However, this seems to be restricted to English and Hindi theatre

Most groups’ vision for an ideal space is one which is intimate, flexible (that allows experimentation with audience and stage orientation) and comes with a rehearsal facility. The latter is especially true for newer groups that do not perform enough to be able to set aside a

budget for rehearsals. The givens would be the comfortable greenrooms, toilets, change rooms and storage facilities, especially since the latter is an issue for most groups who do not own storage spaces. The underlying model for many is Prithvi. Some have even mentioned Ranga Shankara.

There seems to be a need for spaces that allow for visualizing productions outside the confines of conventionally constructed spaces. The more seasoned groups mention the need for Black Boxes. A few directors fantasized about complexes with multiple spaces which offer versatile usage. Commenting on the majority of venues in Mumbai, one practitioner said “Theatres are designed for Marathi commercial drawing room plays and conducive to that kind of theatre and they push you that way.”

Majority of our respondents were clear that spaces have to be spread through the city and interlinked with the rest of it. There was no desire to seek the wilderness and isolation in order to bring intensity to their work. However, there were two who said that their ideal locations would be away from the city where the group could workshop intensely and nature would be a part of the backdrop.

The role that spaces play in shaping the creative interpretation of texts, and in crafting a production cannot be understated. The Mumbai theatre community seems to be keenly aware of this and pushing for more inspiring venues for showcasing their craft.

b. Chennai

“Most spaces are like seminar halls and not suited for performance” (Director Tamil theatre, Chennai)

1. Profile

A glance at Chennai’s theatre map presents the following scenario. English amateur theatre, which took off in the 1960s, with groups like Madras Players, seems to be alive and thriving but is not without trepidation. Tamil contemporary theatre groups see themselves as the last bastions of the Tamil theatre movement (of the 1980s) under the looming threat of commercial entertainment. Flowing under this ‘non-commercial’ theatre scene is Tamil commercial theatre and Sabha theatre (which is a form of drawing room, social drama) which seems to enjoy limited popularity.

The perception of performance spaces and expectations from them are based on the genre of theatre performed. For example, the Sabha groups’ requirement of sound and light facilities varies from that of the experimental theatre groups. This flows from basic differences in theatre sensibilities and approach to the role of performance. While the Tamil experimental theatre groups seem to veer towards socially conscious and activist agendas, the Sabha groups primarily cater to audience entertainment. English theatre appears to have an engagement with craft itself and groups don’t seem to position themselves firmly on either of these pegs.

Most of the groups have been initiated by trained theatre professionals with exposure to theatre inside and outside the country. Except the fulltime theatre group Koothu-p-patrai, whose

members survive solely by theatre and related activities, others belong to various professions. Theatre provides a supplementary income for some (workshops, corporate programmes, children's theatre, etc) and others (like the senior actor from Madras Players) neither earn nor expect to earn from theatre. In this respect, Chennai's scenario is different from Mumbai where most of the theatre practitioners earn (either entirely or substantially) through theatre. The growth of the city has added its stresses- commutes have become longer as have working hours. Actors hesitate to make the effort to traverse the city in order to get to rehearsals at the end of a long day. Women actors, especially, are in great shortage. Groups seem to be affected by the short supply of committed actors.

“Tamil theatre has gone down” says the director of a Tamil group – Theatre Nisha. Practitioners from Tamil theatre express their concern over the decline of number of productions especially over the last decade. Some of them link this to the growing popularity of English as the preferred language in the city, and the language of youth. Established groups like Kootu-p-pattrai seem to be able to build a steady audience, but most others find this to be a challenge. They feel that audiences prefer the lighter social drama. They also suspect that English plays enjoy wider corporate patronage due to the ‘a-political nature’ of their work. In addition, there is a feeling that new plays in Tamil are not being written and that a lack of support for new scripts (in the form of workshops) has added to this stagnation. In addition, Tamil media, in their perception, is indifferent to Tamil theatre which is a contrast to the support given to English theatre by the Hindu. English and Tamil theatre seem to be headed in different directions and the latter is seen as the underdog.

Many Tamil groups expressed their anguish over not being accepted as participants in the ‘cultural scene.’ They lament the fact that government bodies, venue managements, and others do not treat their craft with the respect that music and dance is given in Chennai. Therefore, there are no exclusive theatre venues (other than the heritage Museum Theatre that was built by the British), dates are difficult to get and interactions with venue managements are tinged with hostility. Chennai, they say, lacks a theatre sensibility.

Although there are productions and players, Both Tamil and English groups feel that funding and sponsorships are low. Escalating costs make theatre a difficult proposition. A veteran Tamil director laments “even low cost theatre is not viable in today's situation.” Publicity cannot be afforded by most groups which in turn might impact audience turnout for performances.

English amateur theatre groups seem to be growing, but the pace of activity seems to be somewhat more moderate and mellow compared to the other two tier 1 cities. In relative terms, the English theatre groups seem to be more dynamic and enjoy larger audience following, especially young groups like Evam. The older groups also hint at the extra effort it takes to produce plays in Chennai where, they feel, theatre is on the decline. The Tamil groups are pessimistic and see themselves in a worse position than other groups in the city. Groups lament the lack of contemporary, intimate, exclusive theatre spaces and feel that there is a need to actively support contemporary, non-commercial theatre in the city.

2. Theatre Venues

“Most halls are built for music and dance, suitable for ‘Parsi theatre’ which is now outdated.”
(Member, Theatre Nazhal, Tamil group)

All practitioners unanimously expressed their concern that there was not a single exclusively-for-theatre space in the city. However, some spaces like Museum Theatre (which is used for other government events) and Alliance Française ranked among the most popular venues both for Tamil as well as English groups. Even these, they feel, have their disadvantages in terms of technical and architectural constraints. None of the venues come completely equipped with lights. Often groups hire lights to supplement them. Hall rentals are high according to most practitioners. Some suggest that the dip in productions (Tamil) is because it has become unaffordable. According to an actor from Koothu-p-pattrai, when Alliance gave out their venue for reasonable rates, there was more theatre activity.

3. Most Used Venues

Among the contemporary theatre groups, the most used venues are the Museum Theatre and the Alliance Française. Neither of these is 'ideal' or perfect, but they are preferred because they are 'theatre friendly': good stage (proscenium in Museum), intimacy, good basic lights and acoustics, amenities such as green rooms, toilets, etc. Both have an added draw- Museum is a heritage theatre (built in the colonial times) and has been the favorite venue for a veteran group like the Madras Players. It has a strong association with theatre. According to the director of Masquerade Theatre, Alliance is "actor friendly and warm to the audience." In the past the management has extended support in terms of low rentals, rehearsal space, etc. in order to actively support theatre.

4. Other Venues

Lady Andal Hall is not generally used for productions that need intimacy. This is the latest hall with state of the art acoustics, lights and other facilities. However, this is perceived as a venue designed for rock shows and extravagant events and not suitable for theatre. The rental is exorbitant at Rs. 95,000. This is perceived as the best equipped hall.

Sivagami Pethachi Hall is more popular with the Tamil groups and sometimes used for English productions. Its seating capacity, stage and acoustics make it attractive. Rani Seethai Mandram is compact and centrally located with basic light facilities.

5. What makes Venues Unattractive

Across the board, practitioners felt that there are no well equipped venues in Chennai. In general they feel that rentals are very high and have escalated in the recent past.

Even the favorite performance spaces have their flaws:

Museum Theatre – Many feel that the grids are not sufficient for light design. Availability is an issue as government events are given priority. The management too is seen as uncooperative as they are inflexible about theatre timings.

Alliance Française- This venue poses certain inconveniences. For instance, there is no lift to go up to the second floor, there is only one green room, and the height of the stage makes it difficult to see floor level movement. The low ceiling makes it difficult to use larger props. There are few dimmers and only limited spots can be used.

Among the host of venues that are available for dance and music, none are suitable for theatre. However, many of them (Narada Gana Sabha, Mylapore Fine Arts Club, etc.) are used by Sabha groups who, according to a member of Moondram Arangu, do not need many facilities as they are like 'radio plays.'

The common issues are that none of the venues are meant only for theatre, toilets are poorly maintained, and sound and light equipment/rigs are not adequate.

According to a member of Moondrum Arangu, the Kalaivaanar Arangham which was run by the government (Sangeeth Natak Academy space) was not given to theatre groups. However, it has now been demolished to make place for a new government secretariat building.

6. Infrastructural Needs

"Somehow I have been managing to perform in spite of the space issue" (Director Tamil theatre group)

"I struggle to use good technical facilities in my plays." (Kalai Foundation)

In keeping with the general trend in the other tier 1 cities, Chennai too has its list of infrastructural needs that centre around the basics- lights, sound, basic facilities such as suitable green rooms, well maintained toilets, etc. However, there is a demand for a macro infrastructural base for the city in the form of exclusive 'for theatre' spaces. This is seen as a major handicap in building a theatre community and in boosting theatre activity. This will be discussed further in the report.

▪ *Lights*

The perception of lighting needs depend on the scope of the users' imagination and expertise. Most groups feel the need for better lighting facilities in the venues. While some design their performances keeping in mind the limitations (and thus also compromise the overall performance design), others hire lights and push up their expenses. One director (*Kootharnagam*) prefers to perform in the day or to use general lights in order to cut down lighting costs. The Sabha groups, who use 'illumination' rather than lighting, seem to have less issue with the level of light and sound equipment in their preferred venues like Narada Gana Sabha.

There is a lack of lighting and lighting technicians in most venues, including Museum and Alliance. In the former, there are no adequate rigs, in the latter, there are limited dimmers. These two venues are preferred over others (except the expensive large space- Lady Andal) because of the light and sound equipment they come with. The rest of the venues in Chennai seem to lack lighting that is suitable for contemporary theatre. For example, the lights don't work in Sivagami Auditorium. Venues do not have technical staff and sometimes they do not cooperate.

▪ *Designers*

Directors feel the lack of trained designers in the area of lighting, props and sets, sound and even make-up. Among the practitioners we interviewed, there was only one professional lighting designer. They are aware of the impact expertise in these areas would make in their production. Coupled with the lack of personnel, is the high expense associated with the making of props, sets, and lighting, which often make directors opt for a minimalist production out of necessity. Props and set makers are in

short supply. One of the directors (SLATE) makes his own props. As one director (Koothu-p-pattrai) puts it “we lose the quality of production due to unavailability of expertise in the tech side.”

- *Rehearsal Space*

The lack of rehearsal space is a sore issue with almost all groups, other than those who have their own space (*Koohu-p-pattrai*). While groups in Mumbai seem to be able to budget the expense for rehearsal and manage to find a regular space, the Chennai groups seem to struggle to locate suitable spaces. Given the tight budgets they operate within, rehearsal expenses begin to pinch the kitty. Only personal associations seem to give them access to spaces. Earlier, Alliance did offer their space for rehearsals which seems to be curtailed now. Homes, terraces and schools (if one is associated with them) are the venues to meet and work on a performance. Venues like Narada Gana Sabha hire out their halls only to Sabha theatre groups and not to others.

Often rehearsal spaces are not equipped with lights and sound and therefore actors do not have the opportunity to become familiar with these aspects. The director of Thirai expresses this frustration “*Not having rehearsal space makes us upset and doesn’t allow us to function freely.*” Another actor laments “*We cannot make noise freely.*”

Added to this is the fact that tech rehearsals are not possible within constrained budgets. Often the first show functions as one. This, an actor feels, impacts the cast’s confidence and the performance suffers.

Availability of affordable rehearsal space is seen as a must if “*we are to perform regularly*” (Tamil, young director Nizhal). The lack of rehearsal spaces (along with paucity of venues) is also seen as a deterrent for building solid theatre groups that are motivated to perform regularly.

- *Other Issues*

Storage space for sets, props and costumes is not available. This has an impact on cost as, according to a designer, most props have to be destroyed after the production. The possibility of stretching resources by recycling and modifying props and sets becomes remote as they cannot be stored safely.

Police permissions in Chennai seem to add to the frustration felt by groups. This they feel is big hindrance to production.

Groups have articulated the need for archives and library facilities for theatre material. Currently they claim that there is no one centralized space which offers this. They see this as essential element in building a theatre community in Chennai.

Committed actors seem to be hard to come by. As theatre does not provide any sort of income for most groups, they are not able to attract and keep actors. TV and films, because of their promise of remuneration, lure trained actors away. Female actors are scarce as social mores still dictate what is ‘desirable’ for a woman. A female actor mentioned that it often involves negotiations with parents.

7. What needs Immediate Attention

Despite the struggle with less than ideal technical infrastructure, most groups identified rehearsal space and performance spaces as the key areas that needed immediate attention. The intensity of their views on the two indicates that extent of the vacuum that groups are experiencing in the absence of the two.

- *Performance Spaces*

A majority of the practitioners feel that the theatre community desperately needs exclusive theatre spaces that are able to host regular performances. Despite the pessimistic view of theatre taken by some Tamil groups, the majority feel that theatre among the youth is growing (especially English theatre). Kootu-p-pattrai feels that productions and theatre activity has increased because of its contribution (by virtue of being a full time theatre group). The demand for spaces, sadly exceeds the current supply. In fact, the lack of spaces is seen as one of the reasons why theatre groups may function below their potential.

The demand for more spaces seems to be arising from two major concerns. Primarily, the presence of exclusive theatre spaces with supportive managements, are seen as the catalysts for nurturing ‘professional’ theatre activity. Not only are these spaces expected to provide a common ground for groups to meet and work but they are expected to be able to create and hold a regular audience. Both these would create a demand for productions and a ‘market’ for them. Actors and technicians would be more apt to be in theatre fulltime. Regular productions would, many feel, change the scenario in Chennai to a more dynamic one.

- *Rehearsal space*

Koothu-p-pattrai, which has its own rehearsal space feels that it has a tangible impact on the quality of their work. Therefore, clearly, one cannot underestimate the role played by rehearsal spaces in the creative life of groups. Interactions and sustained work does not seem possible if work space becomes an issue. Therefore, performance spaces with rehearsal spaces annexed to them seem to be the ‘ideal’ for most practitioners.

8. Compromises

The resources available dictate choice of play and its treatment. As an actor puts it “I struggle to use good technical facilities in my plays.” Props are sometimes made by the cast and director. As the cost of wood is ‘like gold’ they are dispensed with entirely. This holds true for use of lighting, which is an extra cost that groups have to bear. Minimalism is often triggered by lack of resources rather than by design.

Directors admit that productions suffer as a result. The lack of tech rehearsals in particular is seen as a hindrance to optimal performance by actors. They are often left to work with the effects on the night of the performance and, as one actor put it, ‘before you get used to, the show is over.’ This comes in the way of a polished and inspired performance as the anxiety of having to ‘expect’ the effects often overpowers them, especially if the actors are young and less experienced.

9. The role of performance spaces

“Performance spaces are important in bringing together artistic people and giving them a space to interact and form vital connections valuable for future creative work.” (Director Thirai).

The lack of theatre ‘friendly’ performance spaces in Chennai has been commented on by all practitioners. Often, Chennai is compared to Mumbai and Bangalore where Prithvi and Ranga Shankara are seen as the icons for the theatre movement. ‘Chennai audience wants to see a play and go home, but in Bangalore they spend some time leisurely ... if you have space like Ranga Shankara with facilities we can create a new atmosphere.’ (Madras Players, director)

The role played by performance spaces in creating an audience and initiating a theatre movement has been clearly articulated. This vacuum is identified as some as the reason for the ‘sluggishness’ of theatre in Chennai, and for the lack of coordination and cooperation between theatre people. “We have fantastic artists here but no place to meet.” The need for a space that facilitates dialogue seems to be felt strongly.

Performance spaces are also perceived as the hubs where a sense of identity and identification with the city may be developed. A senior director suggests “spaces create a sense of identity – add to a sense of celebration in the life of a city.” Another feels that Chennai desperately needs a good performance space “for uplifting the atmosphere in the city and feeling positive” Chennai, like most other Indian cities is expanding quickly. The need for performance spaces in the suburbs has been suggested by many.

10. Ideal Spaces

Attributes that are considered ‘desirable’ vary according to the style and genre of performance. While some feel that smaller and intimate spaces are ideal, others felt that larger 500 seaters would be perfect. In essence, most practitioners seem to consider the quality of ‘intimacy’ important, apart from the technical support systems (lights, acoustics, technical help, wings, green rooms, etc). As in other cities, the fantasy of an ideal included rehearsal spaces, storage, and tech rehearsal facilities. Many refer to Ranga Shankara and Prithvi as the ‘ideal’ because of quality technical support, affordability and ‘theatre friendly’ managements. Some add that the stage, however, is not ideal by virtue of being too low in Ranga Shankara. They also see these places as theatre hubs that are the crucibles for a vibrant theatre movement. Summing up, one director suggested that the place should have the attributes of a Ranga Shankara but it should be modified to suit Tamil/Chennai culture’.

c. Bangalore

1. Profile

In 2005, VIBGYOR, a production house was launched in order to cater to theatre groups in the city. Although Kannada and English theatre have both been active in the city, theatre groups and productions have shown a spurt over the past decade. Some practitioners comment that while the quantity has gone up, the quality has not. In essence, Bangalore presents an active theatre scene, with Kannada and English theatre as the major players. However, one Hindi and Bengali group

have established themselves in the city. Amateur (not commercial) theatre dominates the scene. Commercial theatre, unlike Mumbai, does not have a presence in the city.

The Kannada and English groups both view each other as rivals for patronage: English groups claim that Kannada players garner more state support and Kannada groups feel that corporate sponsors tend to favour the more 'trendy' English groups. Platforms where the two meet are few with only some groups managing to cross the divide (e.g. Sanket). Kannada groups feel that although performances have increased, audiences have reduced for Kannada plays.

Senior theatre people comment that Bangalore, although 'professional' does not have the commercial attitude of the Mumbai groups. Neither is the theatre scene similar to that in Chennai in terms of volume of activity, and the number of groups. Even in terms of available support for theatre, the scenario is different from that in Chennai. There is some level of state sponsorship for Kannada groups (Department of Kannada and Culture, for instance), as well as from local corporate houses. English theatre seems to draw on private sponsorships as well as the occasional grant. However, Ranga Shankara enjoys the support of the government in addition to corporate and grant support. This does seem to have a 'trickle down' benefit to many theatre groups which are able to benefit from the space.

Groups in general generate revenue through workshops and training and are able to use some of this for their productions. Although they may not have the financial resources that are available to most groups in Mumbai, they do not seem to be crippled due to lack of finances.

There is a perception among theatre persons that there is no theatre community in Bangalore, although there is a need for one. One Kannada group did acknowledge the senior theatre groups like Benaka, Samudaya, Kreyative, as sources of inspiration. Resources, skills and even materials (like props, lights) have the potential to be shared as the groups are intrinsically not 'commercial'. Although some attempts were made to establish a platform for this, it seemed to have failed. For instance, Adamyra, a young Kannada group, attempted to set up a website for mutual help, exchange of resources and buying/selling, hiring of props, etc. However, it did not work.

Perhaps because of the regularity of theatre productions, publicity costs seem to be high for most groups. One director expressed the desire to have a theatre journal and use alternatives to journalists and print publicity.

The presence of Ranga Shankara and the impact on theatre in Bangalore has been commented upon by almost all groups. However, this one space does not seem to fulfill the needs of a growing city. The need for more performance spaces across the city has been articulated.

2. Most Used Venues

Looking across English and Kannada groups, there does appear to be a difference in their preferred list of venues. Most Kannada groups prefer to perform in South Bangalore which is predominantly Kannada speaking. English groups prefer Chowdiah Memorial Hall and Alliance Française as second choices to Ranga Shankara. The latter, despite being located in South Bangalore, has managed to transcend the language 'divide.'

Most Kannada groups prefer the old and trusted Ravindra Kalakshetra which was the primary host to theatre until the end of 1970s. Venues in South Bangalore (ADA Ranga Mandira, HN Kalakshetra) although not ideal are preferred by them. Ranga Shankara is a favorite because of its location in South Bangalore and the facilities it offers.

The newer and more ‘adventurous’ groups (both English and Kannada) explore alternative spaces like Seva Sadan and CFD. Because of the pressure on places like Ranga Shankara and Ravindra Kalakshetra, groups have expressed the need for other intimate theatre spaces, especially in the various residential areas.

- *Ravindra Kalashetra*
Favorite of Kannada groups, especially veterans like Benaka. The canteen of RK was the ‘adda’ frequented by theatre pioneers like B.V Karanth. Large wing space, backstage and basic facilities make it attractive. Rehearsal space is also given out for a nominal fee. However, lights are not well maintained and toilets and green rooms need attention. Besides, as it is a government space, and theatre is given second preference. Sometimes plays are bumped out of the programme.
- *Ranga Shankara*
This is the preferred venue for most groups- English, Kannada and others. The attributes that make it attractive are: the design of the space (intimate), the facilities which are hired out for a nominal charge of Rs.3000 (30 lights, good natural acoustics, well maintained toilets, greenrooms, café, etc), the location (fairly approachable for most), and the fact that it is an ‘exclusive’ theatre space. The space has also built an audience around it by positioning itself as a theatre hub. The cost is a major attraction for most because the additional cost of hiring lights and sound is avoided, and ticket sales can boost their cash inflow.

Many practitioners have critiqued its programming policies and management. However, despite this, they prefer to use the venue because of what it offers.

- *Alliance Française*
Many younger English groups who are not able to find a slot in Ranga Shankara perform at the Alliance. Before renovation, the place was seen as flexible space that could be used creatively. However, the venue is used primarily because of the location which draws an English speaking audience. Now with the built stage, possibilities have been restricted. Costs have also escalated. Lights, sound (including speakers and CD players) have to be hired. When added to hiring costs, newer groups find it difficult to break even after a show at the Alliance.
- *Seva Sadan*
This is seen as ‘community’ space. Its main attraction is the fact that the management is perceived as ‘friendly’ and the costs are nominal. However, it does not draw much of an audience (located in west Bangalore) and its proximity to the street makes it noisy during performances.

- *CFD*
The newer English groups find this a friendly place to perform. The place is also offered as an informal venue for play readings. Like Alliance, the limited capacity and added costs (lights), and the rental make this unattractive as it is difficult to break even.
- *ADA Ranga Mandira*
Despite the fact the groups are dissatisfied with the quality of acoustics, lights, and the lack of clean amenities (toilets, greenrooms, etc), it is continued to be used mainly by Kannada groups.

The other venue that has found a mention by Kannada groups is HN Kalakshetra, which is accessible in terms of rentals but poor in almost all facilities and infrastructure. Here again, a supportive management and proximity to audience (South Bangalore) might make this a possibility for groups.

In another league altogether are the large venues which are patronized by large cast productions: Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Ambedkar Bhavan and the Christ College Auditorium. Rentals are above Rs. 65,000 (with added expenses for lights). These venues are not viable for most groups. Besides, with the opening of Ranga Shankara, many of the English groups that were previously performing at Chowdiah have moved away from it.

3. What makes Venues Unattractive

- *Lack of Basic Infrastructure*
Insufficient lights and sound equipment pushes up costs as they need to be hired. As there is a monopoly of suppliers, these costs can add significantly to overall expenses. Venues like Alliance, CFD, ADA Rangamandira and almost all others (except Ranga Shankara), have this disadvantage. It becomes a significant hurdle especially for new groups who are trying to establish themselves, as often they are not able to break even.
- *Poorly Maintained Amenities*
Green rooms and toilets are often not clean and supplied with water. Ravindra Kalakshetra, which is seen as an attractive venue by many Kannada groups, poses inconveniences because of poorly maintained facilities. This holds true for almost all other venues, other than Alliance and Ranga Shankara.
- *Availability and accessibility*
The two most favorite venues (Ranga Shankara and Ravindra Kalakshetra) are often booked up and hard to get. In Kalakshetra, groups run the risk of being bumped off by government programmes (as it is government run). Many groups feel that there is some uncertainty about dates in Ranga Shankara- especially week end dates. Kannada groups like Kalakunja have mentioned that a venue like HN Kalakshetra (where they perform) ends up being inaccessible to people who travel by bus. This, they feel, ends up excluding a certain section of their audience.

- *Managements and policies*
Although the role of RS in ‘keeping the theatre movement alive’ (Antaranga) has unanimously been acknowledged, it comes under some harsh criticism by both English and Kannada groups. Selection policies, they claim, are not transparent. The management is seen as ‘harsh’ and ‘snobby’ by some. There is a feeling that the management is more inclined to accommodate outside groups rather than the Bangalore ones. The newer groups (less established) in particular feel that the policy of filtering groups has a discriminatory effect on them. Often they incur losses as expenses mount when they perform in venues like Alliance.

4. Infrastructural Needs

- *Technicians and Designers*
Trained and skilled designers in the area of light, sound and make-up seem to be in short supply. Groups are aware of the value that light and sound design can add to the production. Many groups have multi-tasking actors (Rafiki for instance) who also double as designers and sometimes crew. Venues also lack trained technical staff that is able to handle equipment well. Those who are there (in R Kalakshetra and RS) are seen as ‘uncooperative.’
- *Lights*
“I am yet to see lighting rigs in Bangalore that work.” (actor/light designer Rafiki). Other than RS that provides 30 lights, all venues fall short of the light requirements of groups. In R Kalakshetra lights are poorly maintained and don’t work at times. Other venues do not have the basic lights.

Lights have to be sourced and are not always available. One director hinted that even organizations that own lights are not always open to lending them. They need to be approached through ‘known’ channels.

- *Sound*
Acoustics in some venues like HN Kalakshetra, ADA Mandira, Seva Sadan, seem to be less than satisfactory. Sound mixers are not available even in the otherwise well equipped Ranga Shankara.
- *Rehearsal Space*
Although most groups have managed to work out an arrangement with organizations for rehearsal space, these are less than ideal and sometimes expensive. For instance, Kalakunja spent Rs.20,000 for two months of rehearsal at Sinchana, which in their view is not an ideal space. There are only few (well hidden) venues like Kalakshetra that give out rehearsal space at nominal costs but these are monopolized by veteran groups like *Benaka*. Many rehearsal spaces suffer from the presence of pillars, lack of lighting and basic amenities. Clustering in the far South of Bangalore make it inconvenient for regular practice (these include KV Subbana hall, MC Anand). Workshop Productions chooses the place according what seems convenient for actors. Most spaces cost about Rs.100 a day. Many newer groups like Masrah and others choose open spaces (parks, National Games Village) for rehearsals.

The need for rehearsal space was unanimously expressed by all, except those who have a comfortable arrangement as in the case of *Benaka*. The absence of a rehearsal space ends up compromising the quality of work that is possible within the groups. *Rafiki* recalled the difference that their 'own' rehearsal space had made to them in terms of intensity of rehearsals. A director from *Artists' Ensemble* has been working on a blue print for a rehearsal space, which she says, is supportive of process. A rehearsal space out to have flexible floors, mirrors, and provide the openness for experimenting with movement, she feels.

Technical rehearsals are not possible within Ranga Shankara. There is a great demand for opening it up for tech rehearsals. First shows often end up serving the purpose of one and actors feel that they are not able to perform at their best.

- *Capacity Building*
The need for training, workshops in voice and movement and theatre craft seem to be common to most of the groups. *Abhinaya Tharanga* runs a theatre school for young people. Some have expressed the need for on going interventions in area of voice, music and movement. A member of *PlayPen* suggested that capacity building in the area of lighting design and sound would add to the quality of productions and provide a valuable skill base.
- *Others*
Storage for sets and props is not always available to groups. This they feel leads to damage and waste of material. A web site was initiated by *Adamyra* in order to help groups source sets, props, costumes and even share them. It was also envisioned as a site for advertising theatre wares that groups wanted to sell, as well as a free publicity spot. However, it hasn't seemed to have had the expected response.

Some have expressed a need for a production house that can coordinate professionally between groups in order to facilitate production. This has already been filled to some extent by VIBGYOR but perhaps there is need for some more initiatives like it.

5. What needs attention

- *Performance Spaces*
Given the scale of the city and its projected growth, the need for other performance spaces (intimate and well equipped) seemed to be justified. Several groups felt that there needs to be performance venues in the north of the city and spread out in various residential areas.

Not all of this needs to be 'new.' The revival and refurbishing of existing spaces (*Yavanika*, *Guru Naka Bhavan*, *Seva Sadan*, *ADA Ranga Mandira*, *Bal Bhavan*, *HN Kalakshetra*, *Ravindra Kalakshetra*, *Dr. Rajkumar Ranga Mandira*, etc). has also been suggested. Some of these, which are government controlled, need to become more friendly towards theatre groups and their needs. *Benaka* mentioned that neighbourhood Community Halls have the potential to be transformed into performance venues. However, they are sadly needing in basic infrastructure and poorly maintained. Others mention the reclaiming of bandstands in parks, abandoned buildings and other public spaces.

In an effort to promote the once popular Ravindra Kalakshetra (which is apparently not drawing audiences due to the traffic on JC Road and inaccessibility), a Kalakshetra festival was suggested. Abhinaya Taranga also approached funding agencies for initiating a performance space in Hanumanthnagar.

- *Rehearsal Spaces*

In asking for more rehearsal spaces, groups are articulating the need for affordable venues where they may come together to work through a production. Therefore it needs to afford them the space to experiment with movement, voice, lights and other inputs that can expand the vision of their performance. They feel that suitable spaces (that are not converted classrooms with pillars) can add significantly to their work.

- *Hub for sharing resources*

A few groups have mentioned the need for a centralized resource centre for sharing information, equipment (lights, etc), and exchanging and recycling props, sets, etc. A website of this nature has been initiated by *Adamyra* but has not got much response. This is envisioned as a cost cutting measure that will also bring groups in touch with each other.

6. Role of Spaces

“A space determines the possibilities of a performance” (Director Black Coffee). After the performance venue has been fixed, Black Coffee reworks the script and the budget. This is not exclusive to this group alone. Many practitioners have said that once the venue is fixed, they allocate funds to various heads. For example, if a group is to perform at Ranga Shankara, the funds that are freed up (from not having to hire lights and sound) are used in other areas of production. Therefore performance spaces determine the aesthetics and the economics of a production.

Within the Bangalore scenario, Ranga Shankara is acknowledged as a theatre hub that has the potential to weave together the theatre movement in the city. Some have referred to it as a ‘brand’ that groups seek. According to the director of Spandana, it has ‘introduced five star treatment to Kannada theatre.’ It is also credited with having given an impetus to more theatre groups and performances with its ‘a show everyday’ policy. The fact that groups can ‘afford’ to perform here (using its lights, sounds and other facilities) for a nominal fee has perhaps made this a possibility. It has also built a theatre audience that is somewhat assured for most productions.

However, it is still primarily viewed as a performance venue and not a meeting ground for local groups. This is an interesting contrast to the opinions that Chennai groups have about RS, where they see it as a collaborative space for the theatre community. Nevertheless, the expectation from a space like Ranga Shankara is to see it function as a launching pad for new groups, and a facilitator for collaboration between what is perceived as fragmented theatre initiatives.

7. Ideal Spaces

Apart from the well equipped technical infrastructure and ambience, the ideal spaces of Bangalore groups came with the following attributes:

- A management that understands the needs of performers
- Transparent programming policies and ‘impartial’ treatment of all groups
- Flexible designs that allows for interaction between theatre and other forms of Creative arts in order to facilitate exchange of ideas and skills
- A Black Box
- A stage that adds possibilities to a production and not restrict it

d. A note on Contemporary Dance

The presence of contemporary dance groups seem to be thin in all three cities. As we have not had a significant response from them, we have not included this group in the main body of our findings. Based on our limited response, the following observations can be made:

- Much of the budget is spent on venues (Rs. 50,000 and above) and on lights, sound and props (Chowdiah Hall, for instance).
- In Bangalore, there are few stages that are suited to dance. For instance, although R Kalakshetra is suitable in most respects, the stage has nails and the greenrooms are poorly maintained.
- Alternatives like the Chitrakala Parishad outdoor stage and Alliance Française are concrete and hard to dance on.
- Unless groups own a space (as is the case with Stem), rehearsal costs are also high.
- Performances are interrupted when power fails as music stops and starts all over again.
- The infrastructural hurdles that theatre groups face are also common to dancers in the city.

Tier 2

a. Pune

1. Profile

Theatre in Pune stems from historical antecedents. The range of genres of theatre that exist today reflect the organic growth of theatre over time. The deep ‘theatre sensibility’ is reflected in the spectrum of theatre groups that appear to be thriving in the city- commercial, ‘semi commercial’, and amateur. Unlike Mumbai, it is predominantly Marathi in nature with English and other languages (if any) being a small minority. Despite being smaller in scale than Mumbai, theatre in Pune seems to have a dense and vibrant presence.

State recognition for theatre in the form of sponsored competitions (with prize money) no doubt provides impetus for groups to be actively involved in theatre. One young group has actually launched its production by using the prize money earned in a competition. The presence of playwrights (like Satish Alekar) whose creative flow seems to be deeply linked to the life of the city perhaps provides an inspiring backdrop. The fact that there is a thriving theatre scene in the city is indicative of an enthusiastic audience base. However, some contemporary groups are worried that the bulk of the audience might shift its loyalties to other forms of entertainment like ‘tamasha’ and popular media inspired dramatic forms. Within this larger scenario, new groups doing experimental theatre feel that it is a struggle to survive in Pune.

Established and semi-commercial groups have a confident stance in contrast to the scenario in Madurai. There is a sense of being ‘experts’ who shape the environment rather than adapt to it. The imagination of these groups does not seem to be crippled by the stress over budgets. As one director puts it, “*First design the coat and then look for suitable cloth- sometimes the design has to vary as a compromise.*” Escalating costs are not only due to inflation but also due to the demand for better quality and range of services and inputs for production- better lights, specific kinds of props, and other support that a play may require.

Experimental groups are high on inspiration and energy but are worried about the consistency of support given the shift in taste towards more commercial forms of entertainment. In this context, the support given by PDA and groups like Samanvay have helped increase experimental theatre activity from 2005. It has boosted the confidence level of these groups who are pushing for space in the theatre scene.

2. Most Used Venues

The choice/availability of performance venues seems to be a function of the genre of theatre. The larger, better equipped venues are more or less monopolized by commercial theatre groups. Experimental groups find it very difficult to get dates in these spaces. Nor have they been designed for a more intimate theatre experience. Sudharshan seems to be the mainstay for them.

- *Bal Gandharva*

The most attractive aspect of this space is that it provides most of the facilities (lights, acoustics) that groups may require. In addition, it has created a loyal audience base and shows are generally well attended. However, it is difficult to get (especially on

weekends) as it is booked by commercial groups. As it is geared for commercial groups, it is expensive.

- *Bharath Natya Mandir*

This is the second choice for groups whose productions tend to be elaborate and expansive. This is the preferred venue for competitions. The advantage of this space is that the management provides help to place ads, and assists in storage of sets, setting up of lights, etc. A veteran theatre practitioner (from a group that was established on 1936) feels that the venue is 'ideal.' The acoustics and the design of the auditorium make it intimate. Since they are an established group, they are able to get dates very easily and hire it at a stretch for 15 days for repeat shows. Others, however, comment that the lights and dimmer boards are in poor condition which forces them to spend on hiring lights. The toilets and green rooms are also poorly maintained.

- *Sudharshan*

Currently, this is the only space that experimental groups feel is open and suitable for 'their kind of theatre'. The space is intimate and suitable for experimental work. It encourages non commercial theatre. As it is meant as a nurturing space for new blood, the rent is affordable and therefore experimental groups have been able to perform regularly. This policy, they feel, has encouraged the growth of young experimental groups. The venue is equipped with lights (pulsars). However, sound poses some challenges. Since it is a converted space, there is very little room for wings, and backstage. Toilets and greenrooms are tiny. One group commented that the low ceiling makes it difficult to create lighting design.

3. Infrastructural Needs

- *Lights*

"Venues don't maintain lights that they do have or upgrade them."

Lights are a constraint for most groups. Not only are they not available in most venues, those that are there are poorly maintained. In Sudarshan and Bharath Natya Mandir- lights are moderately maintained. Groups are charged for using lights- extras are charged (per spot, per hour) which constrains usage. Bharath charges Rs.100 for spots, even if used for a minimum of 5 minutes. In Sudarshan, the metre reading is taken before and after the show and the group is charged accordingly.

- *Sets and costumes*

Sets and costumes have become expensive to make. Many groups are set heavy (especially the semi/commercial ones) and are not willing to compromise. Hiring is not ideal as the only organization that rents them, Manoranjan, does not maintain them well and also charges a monopoly price. All groups use them so the audience recognizes the same sets in different plays. One director expressed the need to "use talent/manpower if available to create visual design for productions."

- *Others*
The quality of acoustics and sound is a problem in all venues. Rehearsal space is not available, and also expensive (100/- per hour). Due to the distances in the growing city, a director, who uses his terrace, feels that it does not really pay off as the cast is tired and grumpy by the time they get there. There are no affordable venues for tech rehearsals.
- *Overcoming constraints*
The attitude of theatre practitioners in Pune is one of taking on constraining situations and finding solutions. For example, one of the actors recalls that when faced with the expense of hiring a rehearsal space, they managed to make it viable by running workshops for part of the day and rehearsing for the rest. "...we hired a place for 8 hrs, had a workshop for 2 hrs and rehearsed for 5 hrs. We made it profitable." Another director explains how they use ingenuity without compromising on effects- "in one of our plays we wanted the moon to be seen on stage and wanted it to descend down into the sea when the play ended. I could use lights that would cost a lot- instead I used a duffli, placed the lights and used a pulley to bring it down, hence reducing the costs drastically'. Groups don't seem to hesitate to borrow funds for their productions. Overall, compared to the other Tier 2 cities, there seems to be a spunky attitude to take their work forward despite being unsure of the future.

4. The role of Spaces

"...there are venues one goes to because something is happening there and there are others that you go to because they are there and you participate in whatever is happening there."

"A good space is one which has built an audience around it."

"... a space means a whole lot- we design our ideas around it and live *around it*."

Experimental groups, especially, have expressed the need for non-commercial spaces that support theatre. Currently the feeling can be summed up as: "*nobody wants to nurture something that is not profitable*" Amateur theatre groups find it challenging to survive in an atmosphere that is geared towards supporting commercial theatre. Venues have rents in keeping with affordability of commercial groups which further stresses budgets and accessibility to spaces.

In this context the role played by Surdarshan is perceived as a nurturing one that helps promote amateur/experimental theatre. Surdarshan, some feel, by bringing in all experimental groups under one roof, has become a hub for experimental theatre and has had a significant impact on theatre in the city. Along with PDA, it has helped to create a new audience.

One of actors also hinted that there are 'commercial' interests who want to patronize experimental Marathi theatre, but they prefer not to be affiliated with anyone. They feel that such patronage may not be necessary given the facilities and encouragement a space like Surdarshan offers. Beside, there seems to be a commitment to perform 'their kind of theatre' and not give in to popular tastes.

Productions have increased (there are ten productions every week). One of the reasons for this is Surdarshan has made it affordable for artists. It is rented out to individuals and not exclusively

to organizations. It makes it easier for non institutions or fledgling groups to use this space as they don't need the validity of an established name or the identity as a theatre group. Some find the space inspiring "*the space gives you ideas*".

Due to the demands placed on it, Sudarshan is under a lot of pressure to cater to needs of groups. Some have expressed the need for more such spaces in the city, particularly in the north of Pune.

5. The Ideal

"Pune needs a space like Prithvi"

"We need Prithvi's attitude and a place like NCPA experimental. We are sure we don't need a unique space like Prithvi- it is very romantic...experimental theater is more practical." (Young actors)

In the wish for 'a Prithvi in Pune' is the underlying need for a space that can become a catalyst in promoting theatre while supporting quality productions.

The ideal space is one which is able to create an audience for amateur theatre while also providing the infrastructural base for performance. This includes lights, scope for light design (in terms of ceiling height, rigs), acoustics and sound, etc. The younger practitioners consider flexibility ('should be able to turn the play around') a priority. It should offer a possibility for multiple activities related to theatre. For some the ideal incorporates multiple spaces that accommodate different kinds of productions. One of the veterans felt that Pune has enough spaces but they all need better equipment and upkeep.

b. Madurai

1. Profile

Madurai presents a rather subdued theatre profile. Contemporary theatre seems to be struggling for a place in the cultural map of the city. It doesn't show the continuity and evolution that is present in Pune. Rather, it seems to be a more 'recent' development linked to Tamil contemporary literary movement of the 1970s and the progressive politics of the 1980s. Heavily dependent on specific individuals drawn from theatre departments of universities, it appears to be slipping into hibernation given that many of the seniors have left the field.

Some older (commercial forms) of theatre do exist in Madurai- 19th century music plays (Isai Natakam) which has emerged from the Tamil traditional theatre form called Therukoothu, and the Parsi influenced company- professional theatre. Both these genres undertake tours. Street theatre (younger groups) which addresses social themes also has a presence. The younger groups, fighting against many odds including lack of funds and theatre venues, don't seem to have the critical mass it move it forward. In fact, many experimental groups seem to be moving into street theatre.

General perception among respondents is that theatre performances and productions have decreased. Two reasons stated for the above is that there is no funding for production (costs have gone up) and there are no audiences as TV and films have taken over. As in Dharwad, Thanjavur, Sholapur, Mysore, they feel that theatre is better appreciated by the rural or smaller

towns which are still excited by live performances. Therefore, they prefer to travel with their shows.

Groups bemoan the fact that there is no theatre movement like in Karnataka, Bengal and Maharashtra, which only adds to their handicap. Those that are active (whom this study covered) were affiliated to educational institutions and the drama department of the University.

2. Theatre Venues

“There is no perfect hall here in Madurai for Theatre”

While the above observation may ring true for most cities in our research sample, in Madurai, the connotation of ‘perfect’ takes on a different hue. Most spaces have not been designed keeping in mind the basic requirements of contemporary theatre- the stage, facilities for light and sound, and basic support for the cast (in terms of green rooms, etc). Practitioners are making the best use of available venues although their primary use is for music, dance and other public events, including weddings.

- *Lakshmi Sundaram Hall*
This is the most used and best equipped in the city. However, hiring charges are steep at Rs. 20,000 to 25,000/- making it an expensive proposition for non-commercial experimental groups. It is attractive because of its stage, good seating arrangements, and adequate lighting bars. Green rooms and ancillaries like canteen and parking are also adequate. A friendly and cooperative management adds value to this space. As it is centrally located and near educational institutions, practitioners feel that it draws an audience.
- *Gupta Hall*
This too is frequently used, especially for theatre festivals. It is a wedding hall with a usable stage. Neither ‘perfect’ not very convenient, groups are forced to use this venue in the absence of alternatives.
- *Other Venues*
 - Raja Muthiah Mandir
 - Gandhi Museum Open Air Theatre
 - Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary Hall: The management is cooperative and allows groups to use the campus. Groups also have a captive audience of students.
 - Among the worst equipped venues is the Krishnayyar Hall which has no points for entry and exits, and has poor acoustics.

3. Infrastructural Needs

- *Lighting*
Light and sound requirement are at the base level- there are no dimmers, and no theatre lights that are available for hire in Madurai. Lights have to be brought from Chennai. Groups use and adapt general purpose lights. There are no lighting rigs and bars in venues. There are not enough technicians for lighting, nor is there the know how.

- *Sound*
Acoustics and sound systems are less than satisfactory in all venues. The only mikes that are available are standing mikes which are not suited for plays. Sometimes hanging mikes have to be rigged up as a compromise.
- *Venues*
Spaces for theatre are a necessity. Currently used venues are not fitted with basic requirements (lights, sound, well maintained green rooms, toilets, etc).
- *Rehearsal Space*
There are no particular spaces available for rehearsals. Previously the American College was being used but not anymore. Spaces have to be found through connections: '*get them through influence.*' For instance play rehearsals are 'noisy' so groups are not allowed to practice. One director commented on the need for his group to meet regularly and work at a stretch over a 15 day period in order to prepare a performance.

4. Immediate Needs

- *Spaces*
"There are 50 spaces in Chennai and only 4 in Madurai"
As Madurai is a major commercial centre in Tamil Nadu, many feel that it deserves infrastructural support for cultural activities. Theatre, clearly is not given priority as a cultural form and this may have translated into the paucity of support for theatre spaces in the city.
- *Rehearsal spaces*
Rehearsal spaces are required to facilitate a coming together of practitioners in a participative process that supports performance.
- *Light and Sound*
Technicians as well as equipment (rigs, dimmers, lights, mikes, etc) are needed. Currently they are sourced from Chennai and expensive. One director mentioned that often they use coloured paper for effects in the absence of lights. Practitioners do not have a 'romantic' approach which makes a virtue out of frugality. The lack in these areas is basic and come in the way of putting together a performance. There is the awareness that they have to compromise significantly on the quality of the production.
- *The Base*
Support and facilitative measures that would generate more scripts, train actors and producers are seen as crucial. The senior theatre practitioners have either moved to places like Pondicherry or have joined film and TV. Because of the lean nature of theatre, many actors have abandoned it in favour of TV or films. Therefore the 'hardware' of theatre needs support. Female actors are hard to come by as it is still

not accepted as 'respectable' by society at large. Therefore they need to negotiate and make compromises.

5. *Ideal Spaces*

"No one consults theatre people when a hall is designed. Even a tea shop 'they' plan well."

Well established exclusive theatre places like Museum Theatre in Chennai, Prithvi (Mumbai) and Ranga Shankara (Bangalore) are seen as 'ideal.' A young actor felt that the ideal space would be one which allows a 'mixed use' for different kinds of performers – folk, contemporary, and others. Some thought it necessary to have the facility to reduce or increase size of the stage according to the performance need. A director who also works in children's theatre preferred a child friendly stage.

6. *The Role of Spaces*

"RS has changed the culture of Bangalore"

"If we have a perfect space Madurai will change."

Madurai, some feel, needs theatre spaces that support regular performances. This is key to building an audience base and a theatre sensibility, both of which they feel is lacking. The predominant opinion is that contemporary theatre in Madurai will take off if they have a space that functions as a hub that brings together theatre professionals in addition to being a performance venue. "Now we just use the space that is all- there is no association with (sic) theatre professionals"

c. Mysore

1. *Profile*

Mysore, being the capital of the erstwhile kingdom of Mysore, has been associated with the classical arts. With the inceptions of institution like Rangayana in Mysore and Ninasam (in Hegoddu), contemporary theatre has also found its place in this city. A Mysore has a slower pace of life and a mild disposition that differentiates it from Bangalore, despite its proximity. The theatre scenario in Mysore draws heavily on graduates/professionals associated with Rangayana and Ninasam. Theatre groups perform predominantly in Kannada. Unlike Dharwad, there is no grant funding for most of these groups. They survive through workshops and using their own funds (got from personal earnings), donations, or sometimes repeat shows. E.g. Mandya Ramesh's earning from TV is used for Natana. There is some amount of support from state bodies like the Department. of Kannada and Culture. There seem to be contradictory views on the state of theatre. While one young actor/director commented that theatre is drawing people who are tired of TV culture, a veteran feels that theatre audiences are dying.

There is a sense of quiet discontent about the high costs of production which is coming in the way of producing more plays. One practitioner felt that the quantity and quality of theatre is on

the decline- as groups are producing for commercial reasons and also competing with each other. Nammana feels that 'hobby theatre' has declined in Mysore. Performances have decreased because costs have increased, making it difficult earn back investment in a production. Groups travel to smaller towns (Raichur, Gulbarga, etc) where theatre still draws crowds and it is possible to sell shows out. But travel for groups has become expensive.

There is a perception that theatre groups are functioning as islands and that there is no cohesive movement as such. This also plays itself out in the emergence of exclusive, performance spaces that are being initiated by some groups (e.g. Natana). Rather than a confrontational attitude that demands supportive stance from the municipality or state authorities, groups seem to prefer to create their own 'comfort' space using the resources that they can generate.

"There might be a problem with the construction and design or with the technical aspects of a space but groups just 'adjust' with whatever is available. So people do not demand 'change.'" (Senior actor/director Rangayana)

2. Preferred Venues

Theatre groups generally perform at old, established venues in the city. Most of these have not been designed exclusively for theatre and therefore have their limitations. Access to Rangayana (Bhoomigeeta), which is designed for theatre, is limited. The trend for groups is to establish smaller performance centres in their 'communities.'

- *Jaganmohan Palace*
This is a heritage theatre and a 'monument.' Acoustics are poor and the hall echoes. Although the conditions are less than ideal, its status as a heritage centre for the arts makes it attractive.
- *Kala Mandira*
This is not designed for theatre but meant to host other events. The theatre community brought considerable pressure on it and had it opened up for theatre. It is affordable as the rent is Rs.1000/- and is one of the most utilized venues. Therefore it is difficult to get bookings, and sometimes the waiting period is one year. Despite getting additional funds of 25 lakhs the facilities have not been upgraded to a satisfactory level. The stage is too large to be used well. There is no wing space and it does not have water in its utility areas.
- *Rangayana*
Bhoomigeetha is an 'ideal' space for theatre. It is the preferred venue except that groups can perform here only by invitation. It has all the facilities for theatre- green rooms, wing space, lights (well maintained), good acoustics, skilled technical help, and good storage space for costumes. The space is intimate (seats 200). The management is friendly and well organized. However, this is open only to invitees who are compensated with only 8000/-.

- *Natana*
This is a private, intimate space that was initiated by Natana. It is primarily used by the groups for performances and rehearsals. Built in what one actor referred to as ‘desi style’, it is large enough to seat 100. It is rented out at 2,500 per day. The disadvantage is that the roof leaks during monsoons and lights are inadequate. Extra lights need to be hired. Acoustics are not good as outside noises filter in.
- *Namana Kala Mantapa*
This is a small space that is largely used by the group. It is hired out at Rs.300/- or sometimes given free. There are other venues which are not theatre friendly: Town Hall, Veena Sheshanna Bhavan, Sahaja Mandira, Suruchi, Sriranga, Rangamandira. Apart from these there are halls in Mysore University, the Medical College and other venues which are not used because of the lack of basic facilities.

3. Infrastructural Needs

“Current spaces are beyond redemption- need to be brought down and reconstructed”

Other than Bhoomigeeta and smaller group owned spaces, none of the venues are meant exclusively for theatre. Government venues are poorly maintained.. For example, switch boards don’t work; green rooms and toilets dirty, etc.

- *Lighting*
“We need magicians who can add to the aesthetics of a performance”
There are no trained lighting technicians that help to design a production. Technical aspects- availability of lights, well maintained switch boards are also a problem in all venues (except Rangayana).
- *Properties*
Groups feel the need for stage managers and property and set managers. Currently they have been ‘managing’ without this kind of assistance but they feel it would add to the quality of the production. There are no storage spaces for properties, costumes and sets. Sometimes they are stored in homes.
- *Venues*
Not only are there very few hospitable spaces for performance, they feel that those that are there have limitations in terms of design of stage, wing space and poor maintenance of facilities (toilets, greenrooms, drinking water, stages, etc.). Power is a problem as it goes off in the evenings and generators come on late. A venue like Kalamandira which is the mainstay of groups, is away from bus routes. This affects audience turnout. Venues are not available as they are subject to internal agendas and priorities. Government spaces are used for a variety of events and theatre is not given priority.
- *Rehearsal Spaces*
Rehearsal spaces that have basic facilities are in short supply. Natana and Namana are used by the groups themselves for rehearsals and not made available to others. Kalamandira, which is often used, is not easily accessible especially after dark. Some groups use the Ramakrishna Mission premises. None of them have facilities that are

essential- lighting equipment, regular power, drinking water, make shift green rooms and separate toilets for men and women. Venues do not permit tech rehearsals.

4. What needs Immediate Attention

Spaces need to be built professionally. Existing venues need to be refurbished and modified to suit theatre needs. One senior actor felt that the current spaces are beyond redemption and need to be brought down and reconstructed. Given that Rangayana is not a freely accessible space, there is a need for additional spaces like Natana and Namana.

Technical support is sorely lacking. Groups feel the need for expertise in the area of lighting design, costume, properties and stage management.

5. Compromises

Compromises are generally made in the areas of design of a production. The limitation of lights and light technicians and sound technicians force groups to make do with what they have. Because of unavailability of lights, it is difficult to explore the potential of lighting. One group makes do with general lights. They also keep sets and props to a minimum. Power cuts pose a problem. In Natana focus lights and gas lights are used.

6. A Note on Natana

Groups feel that a space like Natana has made a difference to theatre in Mysore. Workshops are useful and welcome as they are open to performers from outside Mysore. The regular performances which are possible because of low costs (as the space is owned by the group) have added to theatre lovers' lives in Mysore.

7. Ideal Space

The ideals for Mysore groups are Ravindra Kalakshetra and Ranga Shankara in Bangalore. Some have also mentioned Prithvi. Basics such as good platforms, efficient light and sound systems, good side wings, green rooms, etc are essential. In addition, they visualize common facilities such as library and dorms. Accessibility to all kinds of groups and a non commercial attitude of management is also seen as crucial. The policy of allowing repeat shows they feel will help make theatre viable.

8. Ideas for creating new venues

- Old cinema halls
- Community spaces
- Large backyards
- Bandstands in parks

Tier 3

a. Sholapur

1. Profile

Sholapur supports a theatre scenario that is diverse both in the genres and languages of performance. Hindi, Marathi, Kannada, and Urdu groups have been working in the city although the latter is now on the decline. There is a strong base in traditional performance genres. Musicals, comedies, and historical dramas are preferred. Groups seem to prefer large proscenium stages as it suits the grand style of theatre that is performed. Experimental plays draw a very small audience and have not taken off yet. State supported competitions (similar to the ones in Pune) provide some backing for theatre.

Members of the group seem to multi-task. Actors free lance in TV in Sholapur and it is a challenge is to hold on to actors. Like Dharwad and Thanjavur, the city is a hub from which theatre performances radiate towards villages and smaller towns (e.g. Latur).

Despite the presence of a live theatre scene, the city continues to dependent on technical inputs from other cities in Maharashtra (Pune and Sangli). It is also dependent on a single space- Hutatma Mandir which dictates the design of most performances.

There is a sense of anxiety as groups feel that the public is losing interest in theatre. They feel that commercial ‘entertainment’ like Lavani and Tamasha is drawing the crowds. Some groups work in the area of children’s theatre as a way of building theatre sensibility and appreciation.

2. Theatre Venues

Apart from the feedback on the only theater space in the city, Hutatma Mandir, there is very little feedback on other spaces. Perhaps this indicates the place that it occupies in the theatre map of the city. It also points to the fact that there is paucity for theatre spaces in Sholapur.

- *Hutatma Mandir*

This is the most used and it is considered prestigious to perform there. It was constructed with the help of a theatre person- Prabhakar Panshekhar, in the heart of the city. The venue also commemorates the martyrdom of freedom fighters during the Independence struggle.

It is attractive because it is affordable at Rs. 2,500/ for a 1000 seats. Concessions are given for day time performances which works well for children’s theatre. Toilets and greenrooms are ‘decent.’

A veteran director who works with large productions felt that lights and sound are adequate in Hutatma. Dimmers, spots, as well as pulsars are available. One director felt that the lights provided are not adequate and need to be hired from outside.

It offers large storage space which is an advantage for prop heavy groups. However, mikes are not adequate and sound has deteriorated because of bad maintenance. Light room is high- light operators cannot see the stage. Platforms have become

uneven and need to be replaced. The back stage is used for storing government files and therefore that space cannot be used.

The management seems to have a friendly policy towards old and established groups. Although cooperative, the management seems to have neglected the upkeep of the theatre. The space is run on commercial interests and not really suited for smaller experimental groups. Besides it is difficult to get dates and needs to be booked 2 months in advance.

The only alternatives to Hutatma that were mentioned were the medical college hall and the open air amphitheatre.

3. Infrastructural Needs

- *Lights*
Venues do not provide extra lights- groups have to hire them, sometimes from other cities. Sound too needs to be hired. There are no trained light technicians. One group is conducting workshops for the technical aspects – lights and sound in order to fill this gap. Senior directors feel that the facilities at Hutatma are adequate. Perhaps the genre of theatre that they practice demands less from these inputs.
- *Sets, props, costumes*
Most groups are dependent on costumes, props and sets because of the nature of their productions (historical/period plays, musicals, realistic theatre). The quality of costumes, props and sets is poor in Sholapur and costumes are sourced from Sangli or Kholapur. This adds to expense and inconvenience. Sets, props and spots are hired from Pune. These are expensive (even in Pune). Some sets have been donated by Raju Modak (a theatre practitioner) but they do not fulfill the need. Some groups have given up using sets because they are too expensive. Others use thrift in areas like food but don't compromise on sets and ancillaries. Sometimes they hire a carpenter and make their own furniture.
- *Rehearsals and Tech rehearsals*
A senior practitioner felt that there is a need for a mini theatre that can be used for rehearsals. Currently a venue like Hutatma does not allow rehearsals and tech rehearsals. Groups find it difficult to hire schools. One established group rents rehearsal space at 1000/- per year at a local school. Hutatma rents its space for morning rehearsals to a group which shares a relationship with the venue. The power situation also interferes with rehearsals. As there is load shedding in the evenings, rehearsals have to begin after 9pm.

4. Note on Experimental theatre

The demand among audiences for experimental theatre is low compared to the steady patronage the other forms enjoy. Sakkal, a daily, has played a role in encouraging one act plays, especially with college students. There is an attempt to revive old plays and experiment with adapting other forms of writing (poems) into performances.

5. Immediate Needs

▪ *Performance Space*

There is a need for more performance spaces as currently Hutatma is the only one. This, they feel, will increase the demand for plays. The suggestion is to use Sudarshan as a model so that an audience is built for 'good' plays.

Hutatma needs wise maintenance and refurbishment measures. A director spoke about the government's wasteful expenditure of 30-35 lakhs on building a conference room with sofas and upholstery inside Hutatma. He says, "We don't want such things. We want space to perform."

▪ *Rehearsal space*

A rehearsal space that is large enough to allow the use of props, etc. is required. Groups also mentioned the need for a space for 'grand rehearsals' and a space for discussion among theatre people. A centralized library/ resource facility was also mentioned.

6. Role of Spaces

Groups feel that without Hutatma 'there would be no culture in the city.' Most performances are designed around it. Although it is more suited for larger productions and not necessarily for experimental theatre, it does offer a space for meeting for most theatre practitioners. But the sense of comfort with the space is limited to older established groups. The young groups and those attempting newer forms are left out.

7. Taking Back Spaces

- Some practitioners suggested claiming spaces that can be used for theatre. Shiv Chatrapati Ranga Bhavan used to be a theatre but it is now used as a wedding hall.
- Thamani Theatre was shut down and made into a show room.
- There is a suggestion to convert wedding halls into performance venues. The Kamgar Kalyan Mantap may also be a useful alternative if equipment is made available.

b. Thanjavur

1. Profile

Contemporary theatre seems to be struggling to be accepted as a cultural form. In an environment where 'culture' continues to be associated with the classical forms of music and dance, theatre in general is viewed as entertainment. The support that is required for it to flourish has not been made available. The fact that there is not a single space that is suitable for theatre is indicative of this.

Theatre practitioners also feel 'abandoned' by the 'elders' who were active in the 1960s. According to a veteran practitioner, the theatre movement was very vibrant in the 1960s. There was energy and synergy that contributed to it. With the formation of separate universities and

theatre departments (Pondicherry, Tamil University Drama departments) this got scattered and the energies divided. There is a shared perception among groups that there is a lack of theatre sensibility and appreciation of the craft of theatre.

Contemporary theatre exists but it is not thriving. There is a form of 'social drama' that mimics TV and films which is popular. In the contemporary/experimental arena there is issue based theatre (Dalit theatre for example) which is activist in nature and often performed as street theatre. The aspiration to perform is high among young, contemporary groups but they feel it is a struggle to stay with the effort.

Theatre in the city also seems to be linked to the drama department in Tamil University. This link seems to be necessary for sustaining performances. A young actor from Othagai (Dalit group) comments: "there is no infrastructure here in Thanjavur, particularly for people like me. I often associate with the drama department people and do something." Performances used to be supported by university Drama department but have decreased now. NSD and other workshops could lead to productions. However, there is no follow up after workshops are conducted to actually support production. There seems to be some amount of funding support available for theatre through the UGC, Sangeeth Natak Academy, South Zone Cultural Centre and the Ministry of Culture. The Drama department of the University also provides support. Despite the availability of funds (we do not have details of the quantum of funding as that was not part of this study), there is a perception that theatre is dependent on some individuals rather than a system of support. This may be stemming from the poor facilities that do exist in Thanjavur which makes it difficult to produce and perform plays. All groups survive by conducting workshops. Performances, they feel, are well below capacity and are dwindling because of lack of support.

2. Theatre Venues

There are no venues that have been designed or modified to suit the needs of contemporary theatre in the city. Groups continue to use these venues and 'manage' with whatever is available. The 'sabha' genre of theatre seems to be better adapted to do this.

- *Pethannan Kalaiyanagam*
This has a closed stage and an open space for audience. It is used by some Sabha groups and for public events.
- *Ramanathan Chettiar Hall*
Most Sabha plays are performed here. It is not used by contemporary groups. There is no 'proper' stage and infrastructure (lights, sound) and also the venue echoes. There are no green rooms and toilets are badly maintained. The attractive feature is that it is accessible to audiences as it is close to the bus service.
- *Sangeeta Mahal*
This is a government space which costs Rs. 3000/- to hire. It is located in the heart of the city therefore safe and accessible. It has a heritage tag (started by the erstwhile Maharaja) and is associated with the classical arts. Primarily it is used for dance. The space does not have lights which have to be hired.

- *Others*
The South Zone Cultural Centre's open air stage has minimal lighting facilities. The indoor space is not accessible.
The Tamil University Halls are used only in house and not given to groups

3. Infrastructural Needs

The perception of infrastructural needs depends on the genre of theatre. The Sabha groups, for instance, and older practitioners seem to be able to 'manage' with existing facilities. The awareness of the enriching potential of light and sound technology is higher among the group that does experimental theatre. They are also dissatisfied with the existing venues and visualize a more 'ideal' space for their productions.

"Mood of play or scene cannot be created without lights. Light is equally important in bringing about a 'feeling'. It is a powerful medium." (Othagai, young contemporary group)

None of the venues have been designed for theatre. They are primarily used for public functions, or dance and music. Therefore Thanjavur lacks the basic infrastructural ingredient.

None of the venues are equipped with lights. There are no dimmers or coloured lights. As in Madurai, they use coloured paper for effects.

Acoustics are poor because of echoes. There are standing mikes only. These facilities seem 'ok' for Sabha 'type' theatre- not for contemporary theatre. There are no rigs in spaces for hanging lights. Lights and sound systems have to be sourced from outside and this increases production costs. A local supplier (Murugan light systems) bought 10 lights but no dimmers. The technical aspects (such as lighting) are 'managed' by using the help of friends and associates. There are no trained technicians and these have to be sourced from outside. Because of the difficulty involved in sourcing lights, sound, etc., groups 'lose interest' in using them. Production quality and design, they say, are compromised.

- *Rehearsal Space*
Rehearsals are conducted in homes, sometimes in university halls, or the SZCC hall with permission. Wedding halls, the palace terrace are other favorite venues. Groups feel they need basic rehearsal spaces with toilets and dress change rooms

4. Immediate Needs

"Education is not enough to do better theatre"

There is a need for theatre spaces which can also draw in theatre practitioners in the city. The priority is for bringing in the basic infrastructural elements (lights, sound, etc.) along with inputs in the technical areas (lighting, sound, make up, etc). If there is some support given to theatre, there is an assumption that it will draw back veterans who have left it for other pursuits.

5. Role of a Theatre Space

A reasonably priced venue will encourage younger groups to perform. Theatre awareness and sensibility, practitioners feel, can only be created through regular performances. Besides, an

exclusive space can also function as a meeting point at which theatre people can come together and build a common sense of purpose and identity.

“If there is one exclusive space for theatre there will be many activities in Thanjavur” (young actor/director)

6. The Ideal

The ideal is visualized in the centre of the city as accessibility for audience is important. Younger groups include a flexible stage. This is apart from the lights, sound equipment, greenrooms, toilets, etc. Theatre practitioners ought to be involved in the design and the management has to be theatre friendly. Rigidity of rules and too many restrictions are seen as a hindrance. The space ought to be open to all kinds of groups.

b. Dharwad

1. Profile

‘If I start fighting for infrastructure then my focus becomes a blur. So we work around what we have.’

Dharwad has a reputation for having a refined cultural sensibility. It has been the home of literary icons of Karnataka- poets, dramatists and writers, as well as musicians, many of whom enjoy a worldwide recognition. As a cultural hub of Karnataka that has enjoyed proximity to the colonial Mumbai/ Pune Presidency, it has also been exposed to theatre from the previous century. Company theatres and musicals were very popular. Today, the theatre scenario is diverse and bustling. Although theatre groups have a ‘professional’ attitude, they are not in the commercial realm. Most of the groups draw their actors and directors from Rangayana and Ninasam. Their artistic vision is wide and many of them seem to be eager to experiment and stretch their boundaries. Groups enjoy State support in the form of grants.

Within the contemporary scene, there are two distinct divisions. The full time theatre groups perform regularly with cast and crew whose primary vocation is theatre. There are other groups who are part-time or ‘amateur’ groups. Most of their members have other jobs and sources of livelihood. The part-time theatre groups are less likely to have access to funding and grants. Therefore they perform less than the ‘professional’ groups. The rift between the two seems wide. One ‘professional’ director spoke about her hesitation in working with part-time actors as she felt that they bring down the quality of the performance. She felt that they were ‘untrained’ in terms of voice, body movement, etc. Therefore she felt that working with these actors was a ‘compromise’ as they cannot be expected to fulfill the expectations of the director. The two streams continue to flow parallel to each other with little mutual support.

Professionals felt that the quality of theatre is going down as well as the quantity. Festivals that are organized do not get the best professional groups as most of them are not ticketed. Only amateurs participate in these events.

2. Infrastructural Needs

The list of infrastructural needs includes:

- *Lights*
Most venues (except Srujana) do not have lights. They have to be either borrowed from Gombe Mane (which owns some lights) or sourced from Bangalore. This becomes an expensive proposition. The lack of lights blocks the possibility of lighting design. This, groups feel, inhibits possibilities.
- *Technicians*
There are no trained technicians to operate equipment. There are no set designers, as the rising expense of materials makes set-making commercially unviable.
- *Rehearsal Space*
Rehearsal spaces need to be equipped with drinking water, separate clean toilets for men and women- this seen as a major deterrent for women to venture into theatre. Some practitioners have suggested that the spaces that are no longer in use for performance maybe converted into rehearsal venues. They also feel that all performance venues should compulsorily have rehearsal spaces.
- *Actors*
‘We want to do actor oriented plays. We want more resource people to work with us on body and movement. We need an acting lab that can bring in resource people to learn and get new perspective on theatre’ (Director, Gombe Mane).
There is a need for actor workshops for upgrading technical skill. Trained actors are in short supply as the lure of steady incomes takes them into TV.
- *Others*
 - Flexible platforms at venues
 - Better quick lifting equipment
 - More exposure and work experience with other language groups
 - Lower rentals
 - Display facilities in auditoria
 - Subsidized publicity

3. Perception of Spaces

Practitioners feel the need for well maintained and affordable spaces in Dharwad, where it would be possible to have regular performances. Except for Srujana (the new auditorium that has been supported by INFOSYS), there are no exclusive theatre spaces. Srujana is considered ‘inaccessible’ in terms physical distance and also due to its rental charges (Rs. 7000). However, even in this space there are design flaws like staircase leading up to the stage.

The other venues (Kalabhavana for example) may cost upto Rs.2500 but they will have to invest in hiring lights and sound. Spaces need repair, maintenance and reclaiming as some theatre spaces have been converted to other use.

On the part of government bodies there seems to be a lack of initiative to support infrastructural development projects- some of them have been incomplete or aborted. One director cited the instance of a particular commissioner who sourced lights and started the work in Kalabhavan (as he could not do much about the structure). He was transferred that year subsequently the lights were sold by some other officials.

4. Theatre Venues

- *Srujana*
This is seen as 'elite' space ('VIP theatre for elite people'). It is attractive because it is an exclusive theatre space and is well equipped with light and sound. Most often groups do not need to hire extra equipment. It is also air conditioned. However, groups feel that the management is rigid and rule bound. There are design flaws- e.g. there are stairs on either side of the stage and the banner of the donor/sponsor spoils the aesthetics. Tech rehearsals are not allowed. Power cuts are frequent and there is extra payment for back up. The venue turns out expensive and not affordable for all if there is no funding or grants available. The distance makes it difficult for audience to get to by public transport.
- *Rangayana*
Has not been helpful for local theatre as the space is not given out to local groups, not even for rehearsals.
- *Kalabhavana*
The venue is used as a multi purpose space and is not designed for theatre. Stage is too high therefore seating is a problem. Lighting is an issue as there are no lights. Acoustics are poor and the venue echoes. It is poorly maintained. Apparently, even professional performances can appear in bad light in this venue- "*even 'pros' like Naseerudin- seem bad because of the space.*"
- *Vidya Vardha Sangha-*
This is the most used space although it is poorly designed and equipped. There are no lights and sound equipment and need to be hired. There are no control rooms or cubicles- tables have to be placed for equipment. There is no exit door, no wings and backstage facilities. The green room is in the basement. Overall maintenance is poor. In addition there are security issues, as things get lost or stolen. The management, groups say, have no theatre sense. Timings are rigid. If groups exceed 8pm, they have to pay by the hour.

5. Spaces that have gone into disuse

- *Tagore Hal*
According to a senior person, this used to be a 'beautiful hall' which has hosted performances by stalwarts like B.V Karanth and Badal Sircar. Currently it is used for general purposes and has been taken over by a missionary group.
- *Savai Gandharva Hall and Hubli Town Hall* have become defunct.

6. Other Comments

There is a lack of transparency in government bodies. Although groups receive several grants, the money takes a long time coming. Amateur theatre finds it difficult to survive despite the high level of passion for theatre. Our researchers met a director with 30 years experience in theatre who has gone an entire year without performing. Venues like Srujana are expensive as amateurs do not benefit from grants. They cannot afford the infrastructural inputs (like set designers, lights or hall rentals) that the funded groups are able to have access to.

Professional groups feel the need to pay their actors. But they find their funds stretched because of extra infrastructural expenses. Since it is not possible to have repeat shows (in a space like Srujana) they do not earn any revenue on their productions. For example, if a group spends 30,000 on production, only 15,000 maybe funded through a grant. The rest is footed by the group. They are often unable to earn back their investment as they cannot perform again and double their ticket sales.

7. Ideal Spaces

Practitioners envisage ideal spaces to be intimate with an attached complex for the arts. A café, display space and a theatre infrastructure bank which holds information, scripts, equipment, and archives is part of this vision. Bhoomigeeta in Mysore is seen as an ‘ideal venue.’

Manipur

1. Profile

The shadow of prolonged conflict hangs over theatre in Manipur. Imphal is the centre that draws together performance groups of various kinds and their audience. Given that travel within Manipur (and even within Imphal) is fraught with complications, performances have been affected adversely. However, groups within and around Imphal continue to perform despite the situation.

Manipur is a theatre rich area. There is a versatile bank of experienced and committed ‘seniors’ who have access to over 100 years of theatre history. Many of them have are cultural icons who have set a high standard of theatre that younger people aspire for.

Theatre seems to be embedded in the broader canvas of Manipuri performance arts. This is reflected in the design of performances where the other arts of Manipur are woven in. Theatre practitioners themselves come with a variety of skills and accomplishments including folk arts.

While the profile of theatre groups presents a rich image full of potential, the infrastructural aspects of Manipur are far behind. There is a paucity of theatre spaces that can host theatre performances. The well designed and equipped spaces that do exist are inaccessible as they are the domains of particular groups or organizations. Besides, they are perceived by ‘outside’ groups as ‘exclusive’ and unavailable.

There is a dichotomy that exists between groups that have access to facilities (for instance the CRT) and others who don’t, which unfortunately are in the majority. Lack of access to infrastructure (like minimally equipped venues and conducive rehearsal spaces) adversely affects the quality of performance. A common aspiration of groups is to have one’s ‘own space’ where

they are free to rehearse and perform. Theatre sensibility flourishes but has few avenues for its full expression.

2. Frequently Used Venues in Imphal

The only two spaces that groups have access to in Imphal are the venues of Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy (JNMDA) and Manipur Dramatic Union (MDU). Both these are not 'well equipped' but continue to be used because of lack of choice.

JNMDA is primarily a dance space and is used regularly for performances and rehearsals. Theatre groups get second priority. It is attractive because it is in the heart of city and therefore accessible to players as well as audience. It also has affordable hiring charges and is reasonable well equipped with a green room, a 'good stage', and a beautiful ambience for performers.

MDU is the other frequently used space. The positive attributes are its accessibility, negotiable hiring charges (which makes it affordable) and the commitment the management has to theatre. In terms of basic infrastructure (lighting, sound, maintenance of space) it ranks lower than JNMDA.

Both venues (JNMDA and MDU) suffer from poor acoustics (echo and hollow sound), inadequate lighting, and lack of wings space (MDU). Rehearsal space is not available as MDU used it for its own productions.

3. Best Equipped Venues

The Shrine Playhouse with its well designed stage that is intimate, lighting and sound facilities, good acoustics, is the best equipped performance venue. However, this is also the least accessible as it belongs to Chorus Repertory Theatre. Apart from the fact that it is almost in constant use by CST, groups feel that the attitude of the management is hostile and elitist making it difficult for them to approach the Shrine.

4. Infrastructural Needs

Most spaces in Manipur are not fitted for contemporary theatre. Apart from the Shrine Playhouse, all other spaces are classified as 'ill equipped.' JNMDA and MDU have basic facilities with the former being marginally better equipped. All other venues in Imphal and the districts are in dire need of infrastructure.

The nature of infrastructure begins with the basic- stages that can be used, auditoria and seating, lights, sound equipment, personnel that can facilitate the management of venues, etc. Basic amenities (such as separate toilets for men and women and green rooms) cannot be assumed to be given. Most spaces do not provide them. Practitioners, however, are not suggesting that the basic inputs would be sufficient to support their work. In fact, due to their exposure to performances across Manipur and elsewhere (including South East Asia) their vision for performance is very wide. While the inspiration and skill base is rooted within traditional forms of folk arts and other indigenous performance arts, they are aware of the ways in which theatre technology can enrich the aesthetic and dramatic appeal of performances.

Given the situation in Manipur, dormitories are seen as essential for many groups. As groups and performers move from the districts to Imphal for performances, and vice versa, safe residential facilities become essential. For this reason, Manipuris also prefer venues that are located in the city.

The list of infrastructural needs is as follows:

- Basic light and facilities-There are no grids to fix spots, and lighting equipment is inadequate and unsuitable. There are no focus lights or coloured lights.
- Venues do not have lighting booths
- Power supply is sporadic and back up generators are not always available.
- Venues have poor acoustics. Hollow proscenium stages make voices scatter in all directions.
- There are no separate toilets, green rooms and changing rooms for men and women.
- Technicians are in short supply
- Outside Imphal, some spaces do not have even a proscenium stage. Groups use 'mandaps' and ritual spaces.
- There are no spaces for rehearsals. Groups cannot block moves because of the lack of space and therefore the performance suffers. This is especially so for large cast productions.

5. What needs immediate Attention

The upgrading of performance spaces both in Imphal as well as the districts is seen as crucial. In some cases this might have to begin with constructing a suitable stage, setting up lighting rigs and providing toilets and green rooms. Equipped spaces need to become accessible and open to all.

Rehearsal spaces that can accommodate movement of the cast are seen as necessary. Practitioners also mention that needs to be independent and not attached to any institution in order to make it accessible to all. Groups have also mentioned the need for technical skills development and a technical pool: 'without technicians we cannot produce as we imagined'

6. Role of Spaces

Unlike in the tier 2 and 3 cities where exclusive theatre spaces are envisioned as nodes that will promote the growth of contemporary theatre, practitioners in Manipur ascribe a more finite function to performance spaces. They are the support structures necessary for performances that already exist in the creative landscape of the place. They are not called upon to perform a catalytic function for inspiring theatre. Nor are they primarily seen as theatre hubs, as is the case in the tier 1 cities. The number of performances that do take place in Manipur far exceeds the facilities that exist. Despite the minimal infrastructure that is available to groups, they continue to perform, sometimes using shawls and saris to create dressing rooms in empty halls.

7. Ideal Spaces

Speaking about his view of an ideal space, a senior director says: "It (Manipur) has a long performing tradition. So to adjust the varied performance of theatre, dance, music recitals and

others...we need an ideal multicultural complex having a proscenium stage of considerable size and an open air auditorium for both conventional and experimental performances.’

The vision of a performance complex is a shared one. It reflects the intimate relationship shared by theatre and other performance forms. Stages need to be flexible to accommodate different forms. Spaces need state of the art lighting and sound facilities in order to support creative visions. Equipped rehearsal spaces, dormitories for men and women are also seen as essential.

Chapter III: Insights

In this last section of our report, we will highlight some of our insights into the challenges faced by theatre practitioners across the four regions. The length of our interaction with each respondent (of about 80 minutes) and the subjective nature of the information (which is the base from which our understanding is gleaned) both make it difficult for us to draw definitive conclusions. What the study provides is an insight into some challenges that may be addressed through interventions after appropriate further study of the particularities of these problems, as they vary from city to city and group to group within the same city.

The insights that we have highlighted are by no means complete and comprehensive. We have been selective in abstracting only those that have a direct relation to infrastructure. The fund of details about particular experiences of individuals and groups in the context of theatre in their respective cities can be tapped into for arriving at a deeper understanding of the dynamics that exist between theatre groups, and the relationship that exists between theatre and the particular city.

Although we did include directors, producers and actors from groups, we did not see any significant difference in their experience of infrastructure. We cannot assume that this reflects unanimity. Perhaps this was not a sufficiently intense interaction where such issues could be pursued. The voices of women directors and actors are in the minority. They are almost non-existent in Tamil Nadu. This signals the fact that women continue to be underrepresented in theatre in Madurai and Thanjavur because of the social norms that prevail. It therefore is also comment on the level of social acceptability of theatre performers.

1. The larger picture

At the end of the research, we find that our understanding of what constitutes ‘infrastructure’ for theatre practitioners has been widened. Our list which mentioned inputs such as lights, sound, green rooms, props, etc. has been stretched to include much more.

Knowledge and Skills

Apart from the physical infrastructural elements that support performance (lights, sound, stage, green room, etc) the role of knowledge and skills seems to be a crucial one. Technical skills in the area of light design, sound design, stage management, craft related to props and sets, make up, are all seen as equally important aspects of infrastructure.

Workshops for actors in voice, movement and other skills, technical skill training (area of lights, sound) are being sought by groups. This need is more intensely expressed in smaller cities (tier 2 and 3) but is also a concern in a city like Bangalore which already has established theatre groups. In Thanjavur and Madurai, the need for scripts and directors was added to the wish list.

Performance Spaces

Venues for performance are the ‘temples’ in which the fruit of the creative process of crafting a performance is shared with the public. Their physical attributes (design and architecture), their management and programming styles (including maintenance), physical location and accessibility, and symbolic value in the city, all contribute to the quality of relationship that they

have with the theatre community. The fact that they have a dynamic relationship with production and performance is never disputed. But what is suggested in the conversations with practitioners is that most often this fact is given a backseat while planning or managing a performance space.

Architecturally, spaces play a powerful role in the shaping of performances. Especially in cities that are dependent on single spaces (like the Hutatma Mandir in Sholapur or Museum Theatre in Chennai, Prithvi for some groups in Mumbai), performances are often designed keeping in mind the contours and eccentricities of the space.

The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre provides an insightful comment:

“Although theatre architecture is the result of a theatrical manifestation, it becomes itself, once translated into terms of a building, an important influence. By its solidity and technical limitations, the building which has evolved from drama subsequently disciplines and inhibits the drama it contains.”

The potential for flexibility needs to be factored into designs for venues.

Theatre spaces which are designed to support contemporary theatre (as opposed to halls that can double up as music venues and wedding *mantaps*) are the ground on which work of theatre groups are expressed and shared with the public. The importance of theatre spaces, that are designed for theatre by persons involved in theatre, in supporting performances has come through in all the conversations about spaces.

Majority of the groups in cities other than Bangalore, Mumbai and to some extent Chennai, are ‘making do’ as far as performance spaces are concerned. The situation is grim in Manipur where even basics are hard to come by. This is especially ironic since the intensity of theatre activity is proportionately high here. The scenario in Madurai, Thanjavur and Chennai is slightly different. Here spaces are seen as necessary agents in promoting theatre by making it possible to have regular performances. They are expected to create a demand for theatre whereas in Manipur, they are filling a demand for space by theatre.

The supportive role played by spaces like Prithvi, Ranga Shankara, Sudarshan (and to some extent Natana) in promoting ‘new’ theatre and providing affordable and well equipped venues, was loudly acknowledged across the board. They have become entrenched in the cultural life of these cities as ‘theatre places.’

Theatre friendly managements and programming

When theatre groups articulate the need for theatre ‘friendly’ managements, they are commenting on programming policies and the quality of their interaction with theatre managements. Performance venues, despite their significant presence, remain inaccessible to some groups as they feel that their programming policies exclude them. For instance, younger groups (who do not have many performances under their belt) find it difficult to get a foothold in Ranga Shankara. In Prithvi, many groups are bewildered by the process of selection, although by and large it is seen as sympathetic to newer groups. Lack of transparency, inconsistent policies are the other ‘problem’ areas that have been identified.

The policy of restricting tech rehearsals has an impact on the quality of performance. Actors, especially, feel they perform under their capacity as they are constantly anxious about ‘what to expect’ in terms of lighting, etc.

On the positive side, certain venues (like the Alliance Française Chennai) are favored because of the supportive attitude of managements, although they may not be ideal venues to perform at. Sudarshan in Pune, is appreciated for its active supportive stance – not only does it provide a quality space for performance, but also a nurturing environment.

The perception of most groups is that managements are ‘commercial’ and don’t have any interest in theatre. This, they feel, is visible in the lack of care that goes into maintenance of facilities such as backstage and wing space, green rooms, toilets, and in policies that end up squeezing groups for time and money (for example, groups are expected to vacate the premises by a fixed hour, regardless of the work involved in packing up). These too have an impact on performance. As a director from Mumbai suggested, the fact that Marathi groups choose to ‘illuminate’ rather than do ‘lighting’ may also be due to the fact that they get very little time to set up before a performance.

Rehearsal Spaces

Groups by and large make do with pillared halls in schools, and venues that are cramped and sometimes inhospitable, with no water and toilets. Lighting rigs and provision for using sound are almost non-existent except in the case of venues that are owned by theatre groups. Rehearsal spaces are the seed-beds in which a performance is germinated and nurtured. Therefore this is a concern for performers across all cities and has come through in conversations as an important requirement for supporting theatre.

As the particularities of needs differ from city to city, the highlights from each tier (with details of cities) may provide further details.

2. Tier 1: Mumbai, Chennai, and Bangalore

2.1. Common Concerns

While the details of the experiences of theatre groups in the Mumbai, Bangalore and Chennai vary, the basic concerns seem to be shared. The following areas have been distilled on the basis of the intensity with which practitioners have responded to various infrastructural aspects. This may feed into possible intervention strategies after a more particular and nuanced understanding of these concerns in each city.

- ***Rehearsal Space***

“The most glorious moments in theatre are those when the play goes on the rehearsal floor. That is when those involved in the play are trapped in a closed, almost claustrophobic space inviting an excruciatingly joyous journey of exploring the text, ourselves and each other” (Mahesh Elkunchwar)⁵

In asking for more rehearsal spaces, groups are articulating the need for affordable venues where they may come together to craft a production. A rehearsal space needs to

⁵ From Notes on Theatre (p.336) in *Collected Plays of Mahesh Elkunchwar* OUP 2009.

afford them the openness to experiment with movement, voice, lights and other inputs that can expand the vision of their performance. It can, therefore, be seen as the substratum on which a production is founded.

The need for a regular, reliable, affordable rehearsal space that is equipped (large enough for blocking moves, basic light, sound, greenrooms, toilets) seems to be expressed in all the tier 1 cities as well as in Imphal. This was illustrated by one actor from an English group in Bangalore, who recalls that the opportunity to use an exclusive rehearsal space over an extended period of time allowed them to work on various aspects of the production. However, since sound did carry, they did hear the protesting thud of the occasionally stone on their roof! The importance of a rehearsal space which is conducive for experimentation and evolving a performance has been mentioned by the members of Koothu- p- Pattra (Chennai).

In Tier 1 cities where distances need to be considered (especially in Mumbai and Bangalore), there seems to be a need for 'local' venues where groups can meet and rehearse. Perhaps it is no longer feasible to continue to seek informal venues like homes and terraces that are fast giving place to smaller apartments. Although Mumbai groups seem to manage to set aside part of the budget for rehearsal expenses, the need for convenient and well equipped spaces would be welcome. Groups have also suggested the setting up of rehearsal annexes attached to performance venues. In Bangalore there is also a need for spaces that allow tech rehearsals as the current venues (especially Ranga Shakara) do not permit them. In Bangalore, the *Actors' Ensemble* has been working on a design for a rehearsal space.

▪ *Lighting*

Lighting is a major element of stage craft and is also not of optimal quality/quantity in most performance venues. At one level, groups are concerned about the availability of lights, rigs and points, and skilled technicians at venues. This has a direct impact on the production either because budgets have to be stretched to accommodate hiring (if the venue does not provide lights) or 'making do' which impacts the overall effect and presentation of the production. The data also suggests that concerns go beyond lighting equipment.

- Groups are aware of the need to include lighting design as a dynamic partner in designing a production.
- There are few lighting designers who work across genres in all the cities- the least being available in Chennai. Mumbai has more professional designers than Bangalore. In Mumbai, many groups may not be able to afford their services. In all cities there seems to be a need to explore lighting design through training and to acquire skills in the area in order to make optimal use of it.
- Upkeep and maintenance of lights and lighting equipment seems to be a necessity in all venues.
- Need for trained and skilled technicians at venues so that the optimum use can be made of equipment.

Although the need for sound design was less vociferously expressed, there is a sense that sound design does need attention. Currently a sound mixer is not available in the

otherwise well equipped Ranga Shankara. One actor/designer did feel that it was necessary to create overall sound design.

- *Taking Theatre to the Suburbs*

All three cities felt the need for establishing performances spaces within the suburbs. Transport glitches, long working hours and congestion seem to have robbed venues of their audiences. Or such is the perception of many groups. In Mumbai and Chennai, the shift of old audiences from the city to the suburbs seems to have impacted audience turnouts especially for Marathi and Tamil plays respectively. Some in Bangalore also suggest the revamping of old ‘neighbourhood’ theatres.

- *Larger Areas that impact performance*

Overall, there is a feeling that theatre groups are working in isolation from each other. Attempts to network have been made. To some extent Prithvi and Ranga Shankara are seen as ‘shared theatre spaces’ but this limited to some groups only. Others feel excluded from it. The fault lines seem to run through language- Tamil separate from English, Kannada from English, and Hindi and English from Marathi theatre. However, especially in Bangalore and Chennai there seems to be a need to build a theatre fraternity. Networking, sharing of information and resources (like props, sets, costumes, etc) has been suggested. In Chennai there is a concern that Tamil theatre is on the decline. Partly, the absence of full time groups such as Koothu- p-pattrai is seen as deterrent to the health of Tamil theatre.

3. Tier 2: Pune, Madurai, and Mysore

3.1 Common Concerns

- *Maintenance and upgrading of technical equipment.*

Lighting (lights, dimmers, boards, etc.) is a priority area. In Madurai there is a severe shortage of equipment. Costs escalate because the need to be sourced from outside the city.

- *Technical staff and designers*

Light designers, sound designers and those who specialize in set and props are in short supply. Groups would rather not compromise and ‘manage’ and ‘multi-task’ in these expert areas. These are seen as important aspects of building a performance. In Pune where prop heavy plays are popular, this becomes an impediment. There are few resources that hire out costumes and those that are there are in bad condition. Props, costumes, sets are expensive to make and maintain. So these are compromised the most while budgeting for a production.

- *Intimate Spaces*

In Pune and Mysore, the dynamic role of intimate performance spaces in promoting experimental theatre at low cost has been appreciated (Sudarshan and Natana). A need has been expressed for more such spaces as the supply is far below the demand.

Madurai awaits such a space as it feels that contemporary theatre will take off even with one such space.

- *Rehearsal space*
This is an urgent need. As in other cities, the tier 2 cities lack a space that supports the process of building a performance. A regular venue where actors can ‘make noise’ freely and work consistently is crucial.

3.2. Divergence

The three cities present distinctly different pictures in some respects.

Pune and Mysore are better in terms of availability of spaces, infrastructure and support for theatre (both in terms of audience and financial support). Madurai has a more intense need for both. In Madurai basic theatre spaces need to be established either through revamping old venues or establishing newly designed ones.

The nature of infrastructural needs may be similar but the dynamics in the theatre community vary in each city. This variation will have an impact on how they relate to each other within their respective cities. It needs to be given attention if resources are to be channelized optimally using the agency of particular organizations or groups/individuals in the theatre community of these cities.

In Pune, the separation between commercial, semi-commercial and amateur groups plays out in the access each kind of theatre group has to funds and other resources. The experimental groups (which are amateur) have different needs in terms of infrastructure (light design, intimate spaces for example). Although there is no mention of hostility, these exist as separate streams. In Madurai, theatre seems to be floating in a largely indifferent environment where theatre professionals (from the University) are the only significant voices. In Mysore, the groups seem to be operating as separate entities. This is reflected in the aspiration for separate spaces rather than a push for revamping common spaces. Rangayana, although in Mysore, appears to have an exclusive identity. The limited access to Bhoomigita (‘invitees only’) further accentuates this.

4. Tier 3: Sholapur, Dharwad, and Thanjavur

4.1. Common Concerns

- *Technical needs*
In all three cities there are few resources within easy reach. Lights are sourced from outside, and sets and costumes from outside in Sholapur (which has a bias towards historical plays and musicals). Most venues do not have rigs, lights, and technicians. Sholapur and Dharwad each have at least one group that shares resources (Gombe Mane, Dharwad- lights, Raju Modak, Sholapur- sets).
- *State of contemporary theatre*
In Sholapur and Dharwad there is a substratum of theatre history on which the contemporary scene is built. There is a level of confidence in the future of theatre (although they both sound pessimistic about it). There is a low demand for

contemporary theatre. In Dharwad, where there is a paucity of ‘professional’ trained actors due to the lure of TV, there is a demand for workshops for actors and technical staff. In Thanjavur too, there is a need for skills in acting and production.

- *Traveling theatre*

In Dharwad, groups find it too expensive to perform regularly. Therefore, all three cities have performances radiating outwards towards smaller towns and villages where they feel there is a demand for theatre. Some theatre venues have shut down and emerged in other avatars in Dharwad and Sholapur.

4.2. Divergence

- *Sustenance*

Sholapur has many State held competitions with prize money that sustain the groups financially. There is also a high demand for ‘commercial’ productions in the traditional theatre genres- historical, musicals, social dramas, etc. Contemporary theatre seems to be struggling and enjoying feeble support in Sholapur.

In Dharwad, some professional groups sustain themselves through funds from state agencies (such as Department of Kannada and Culture) which enables them to use venues like Srujana. They do not participate in festivals because these performances are not ticketed.

The Thanjavur scenario seems impoverished in terms of funds. It is highly dependent on theatre department personnel for any kind of support. Many groups are taking to issue based street theatre which is performed in collaboration with NGOs. The need to perform is high, but there are few productions because of low patronage.

- *Attitude*

Dharwad and Sholapur both have a ‘professional’ theatre attitude:

There are regular performances through which groups subsist. Most consider theatre their ‘profession.’

Thanjavur seems to be working under a shadow of ‘what was.’ There is a perception that theatre is rudderless. They feel there is no theatre movement in the state to support them, nor is there a sensibility. Although there are some grants from the SZCC, there doesn’t seem to be much infrastructural support that may add to this. The absence of tech professionals and equipment is acutely felt. Despite the absence of regular funds, Thanjavur seems to spend the most (compared to other Tier 3 and 2 cities) on its production. This probably due to the short supply of infrastructure. Groups might end up spending premium amounts on infrastructure and technical services.

5. Manipur

Manipur offers a scenario that cannot be compared in simplistic terms with the other cities. The particular everyday circumstances under which Manipuris live, the place that performance arts

has in this state and the conditions under which these arts are showcased and publicly communicated are all unique to this state. While the list of infrastructural needs identified by Manipuri theater practitioners may resonate with those of the tier 2 and 3 cities, the extent of theatre activity and 'sensibility' is closer to the tier 1 cities.

The level of exposure to theatre practices, trends, possibility (national and international) is high. This is so because of the presence of highly established theatre veterans (Kanhialal, Ratan Thiyam and others), the availability of NSD trained theatre practitioners, and the versatile pool of performers and performance genres that are indigenous to Manipur. Therefore the canvas is broadening the awareness of possibilities of using technology (e.g. lighting), and of visualizing performances. This places a demand on the infrastructure which is barely capable of hosting the most basic of performances. Gap between 'possibilities' and actuality is large.

Resources are concentrated in what have been perceived as 'exclusive spaces like the Shrine theatre. Facilities elsewhere are poor- especially in the districts like Nambol and Awang Sekmai.

In this scenario, performances spaces are needed to accommodate and support theatre that exists and not necessarily to build it (as is the case especially in other tier 2 and 3 cities, especially in Tamil Nadu). In Manipur, there is a rich variety of theatre possibility but few 'comfortable' spaces to express them.

Chapter IV: Recommendations

“The worst pain a man can suffer: to have insight into much and power over nothing.”⁶

One of the constraints imposed by the design of the study, which is an exploration into the particular experiences of theatre practitioners across different scales of cities, is that recommendations that apply broadly across the board do not seem possible. Funneling the data can end up erasing the differences in conditions, the variation in expectation from infrastructure, and the specific needs for groups in the different centres. A richer and more textured appreciation of specific areas for intervention may be gleaned from a close reading of the profiles and needs listed under each city.

However, going by the intensity of some responses and the suggestions made by the respondents, the following areas can be highlighted as ‘hot spots’ for possible intervention.

1. ‘Hot Spots’

Rehearsal Spaces

This could be refurbishment of theatre venues that are not in use in some cities, or support for groups that want to initiate a rehearsal venue. Apart from the provision for basic lights, sound and support facilities, there needs to be attention given to details that are essential for process and experimental work. These have been identified as attributes of a sound rehearsal space. These may be, for instance, provision for mirrors, surface that allows movement, etc.

Upkeep of existing spaces

In some cities (Pune, Dharwad, Mysore, Bangalore) performance spaces that exist have fallen into disuse or have not been maintained. After identifying spaces that may be potentially used optimally (which would be dependent of how accessible they are in terms of location and the design of the spaces) the feasibility of refurbishing some of of them needs to be assessed. The particular needs of the space that are identified by its users ought to be identified. The plan for refurbishment needs to be fed by the inputs of theatre practitioners in the city. As the experiences in Sholapur and Dharwad have shown, government agencies may not be the best to initiate this. In the former, refurbishment took the shape of expensive upholstery in a conference room at the Hutatma. In the latter, the initiative for new lights for Kalabhavana evaporated when the bureaucrat in charge was transferred.

Intimate Performance Venues

This is potentially a sound area for intervention across the board. In Mumbai the need is for spaces in the suburbs. In Bangalore, with the arrival of Jagriti, this may be taken care of to some extent, although groups have suggested small spaces in ‘localities’ throughout Bangalore. In Chennai, Pune, and the tier 2 and 3 cities, this seems to be a dire need. Affordability (which encourages regular performances) and technical support seem to be the attributes that would make these spaces usable.

⁶ Attributed to the Greek writer Herodotus (4th Century BC)

Technical Pool

Given the paucity of technical know how that exists (including the short supply of light, sound, stage designers), workshops for design skills may be a possible avenue for intervention. But this would work only if there was a base infrastructure (in terms of lights, sound equipment and support facilities) at venues. Therefore, although there is an expressed desire in Madurai and Thanjavur, these may not be the best candidates for this intervention at the moment. Inputs on how to use existing technology optimally could also prove to be helpful.

Skills Updates and performance support

Skills workshops for actors and directors maybe initiated, especially in the Tier 2 and 3 cities. In Thanjavur, Sholapur and Madurai where there is a need for scripts and fresh ideas that support experimental theatre, writing workshops may add vibrancy to the creative climate.

City-wise Interventions

Each city has its unique set of infrastructural needs that are crucial within their particular contexts. However, Chennai, Manipur, and tier 2 and 3 cities show a wide gap between infrastructural needs and availability. This is not to suggest that tier 1 does not warrant intervention: an initiative for a rehearsal space in Bangalore or Mumbai might contribute intensely to theater in these cities.

Thanjavur and Madurai present unique challenges. In these cities theatre is struggling to be accepted as an ‘art form.’ Writing workshops, festivals and other events might be one method of intervening and building a more appreciative base for theatre. Since theatre groups are in a more fluid state (where there is no visible presence of a defining theater movement), it might be possible to work collaboratively with the theatre community to come up with suggestions for interventions. This however needs to be explored on site as perceptions recorded in the course of an interview cannot always reflect the ‘complete picture.’

2. A word of Caution

While planning any intervention care needs to be taken to study the dynamics that exist between theatre groups, and between the theatre community and the city. While working with local partners, the following need to be kept in mind:

- Limitations of government agencies and bodies: our data shows that government (local/city) cannot be relied on to come through with infrastructural projects. Besides, the most neglected spaces are the ones run by government bodies.
- Limitations of theatre organizations and institutions: feedback on spaces that are run/ owned by institutions (whether it is Rangayana, CRT or Natana) indicates that resources can end up becoming the exclusive domains of these groups. This may be due to the fact that they are constantly used (either for production or rehearsals) and therefore cannot be made available to others. Therefore, if collaboration with a local group/institution is being considered, it might need to include a broader section of the theatre community to ensure partnership and accessibility to resources.
- One needs to take into account that ultimately, the manner in which resources are accessed and used is also a function of power dynamics within a community. Often the most marginalized are also the least benefited. Checks against such a situation need to be collectively arrived at and agreed upon in order to maximize the beneficiary pool for any intervention in the realm of infrastructure.

3. The Way Forward

This study, as the name indicates, sketches a basic picture and rough possibilities for intervention. These are indicators that need to be pursued further in the form of more detailed study and data gathering. It would involve on-site research into the particular details of areas identified for possible intervention and the participation of the theatre community in coming up with an action plan. The intervention process, if perceived as a collaborative one, may itself begin to draw various groups into a synergistic body.

4. An after thought

The most adverse of conditions also happen to inspire our most creative moments. This is true of art forms in general and perhaps also applies to theatre. In attempting to dissolve some infrastructural hurdles, one may not in effect inject more life into the theatre community if there is none to begin with. Interventions may be undertaken with the consciousness that they are chipping tools that are working on extraneous blocks. At best, they may be supportive platforms for theatre that is waiting in the wings. It would be unrealistic to expect any intervention to initiate and maintain creative flows in theatre where there is no mother spring.

The base line study is a spring board for designing further initiatives for investigating potential areas for intervention that may play a supportive role in the life of contemporary theatre in our cities.

Annexures

Annexure A

THEATRE BASELINE STUDY TIPS & GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCHER

Getting Started

- **First call- mention the nature of data required in terms of expenses so that the respondent is prepared to fill out the table. Also make sure you mention the length of the interview- 1.30 hrs to 2 hrs (max).**
- **Choose venue that is not noisy**
- **Read the Questionnaire well and prepare your guide which will help you conduct the interview smoothly. For example, make reminders for yourself that help you stay focused.**
- **Check you recorder- MAKE SURE BATTERY IS WORKING. CARRY A SPARE.**
- **Carry your note book**
- **Call and confirm time and venue**

The Interview Process

1. Introduce yourself
2. Introduction to the Study
 - aim and span of the study - IFA- to understand the issues related to theatre/performance in 4 States
 - Outcome- 1. Data base of performance spaces 2. Identification of needs by the theatre/dance communities that can feed into future projects
3. Mention confidential nature of interview- Names will not be quoted in the Report. Recordings are a memory aid to transcribe interview.
4. If possible, let respondents fill out tables related to productions and expenses
5. Begin the interview by talking about their experience in theatre/dance
6. Follow your instincts and ask questions that will open up the conversations
7. **Listen- sometimes at the end of a story comes the actual information! Be patient.**
8. **But watch out - if the respondent gets stuck on a topic, gently move the discussion towards the relevant questions**

Guidelines for Recording Data

1. During the interview, make notes without losing contact
2. Make sure you make a note of names of respondents and their opinions (they may get mixed up at the end of the interview)
3. Write down quotes which are valuable or interesting
4. Take relevant pictures of venues and collect flyers, posters of group (if available)
5. Collect posters/flyers of performance venues you visit for the study.

6. Transcribe (write notes) on the same day. Add your impressions- e.g. socio-eco background of group, any unique feature of the group.
7. Fill out the report according to the reporting format.

****Attached- a list of possible heads for infrastructure. There may be some mentioned by respondents or that you can think of that are not there in the list.**

This is for your reference to help with the interviews

1. The needs and problems faced by performance groups in the following areas: (for performance interviews).

- a. Performance spaces- design, facilities available- green rooms, change rooms, sound/light, toilets, canteens, stage quality, management's approach/policies, etc.
- b. Rehearsal spaces- distances, suitability of space,
- c. Lights- equipment and facilities to rig up lights, availability of technicians, etc.
- d. Sound recording and play back equipment
- e. Sets and scenery (flats, furniture), storage for the same, transport into venue
- f. Stage properties
- g. Costumes- availability, costs, etc.
- h. Musical instruments
- i. Make-up
- j. Technicians – set designers, lighting designers, sound designers, musicians, carpenters, make up artists, costume designers, etc.

2. The needs and problems faced by festival organizers

- a. Performance and rehearsal spaces
- b. Technical requirements
- c. Technicians – set designers, lighting designers, sound designers, musicians

3. The advantages and disadvantages of performance spaces, including upgraded spaces, in each city under the following heads:

- a. Basic information (location, contact details, etc)
- b. Technical infrastructure
- c. Policies
- d. Programming
- e. Additional facilities
- f. Technical qualifications of staff
- g. Costs

QUESTIONNAIRE

Theatre Infrastructure Baseline Study

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR DIRECTORS / PRODUCERS/Personnel who make the financial decisions

COMMON QUESTIONS (*) FOR DIRECTORS/PRODUCERS/ACTORS/DANCERS/OTHERS

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR ACTORS/DANCERS/TECHNICIANS

I. BACKGROUND (TO BE FILLED BY ALL RESPONDENTS)

Name: _____ **City** _____

1.Primary role (director / actor / production / dancer/ choreographer/other):

2.In what capacity have you been involved in theatre/dance?

3.For how many years have you been doing theatre/dance? _____

4.How did you start doing theatre/dance?

5. Does theatre/dance contribute to your income? If yes, approximately, what percentage?

Name: _____ **City:** _____

1. Primary role (director / actor / production / dancer/ choreographer/other):

2. In what capacity have you been involved in theatre/dance?

3. For how many years have you been doing theatre/dance? _____

4. How did you start doing theatre/dance?

5. Does theatre/dance contribute to your income? If yes, approximately, what percentage?

Name:

City:

1. Primary role (director / actor / production / dancer/ choreographer/other):
2. In what capacity have you been involved in theatre/dance?
3. For how many years have you been doing theatre/dance? _____
4. How did you start doing theatre/dance?

5. Does theatre/dance contribute to your income? If yes, approximately, what percentage?

II. ABOUT THE GROUP (To be mentioned to respondent in advance. May be filled out by respondents)

1. Name of group:
2. Contact details: Address:

Telephone

Email

3. Run / owned by:
4. Registered as (Trust / Cooperative / Society / Not Registered):
5. Language(s) of performance:
6. Genre of performance (Theatre/Dance):
7. Specific type of performance (if applicable):
8. No of people in group (core):
9. Any relevant details about the group:
10. Year of establishment:
11. Kinds of activities undertaken (e.g. workshops)
12. Total Number of productions to date (approximate)
13. Total no. of workshops
14. Frequency of performance:(through the year/seasonal, etc)

15. Year wise productions in the home city:

1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007

*** (If performances are largely outside the home city, ask for the reason)

16. Estimated revenue (income) over the past 10 years (if possible).

EXPENDITURE

1. Approximately how much have you spent on the various heads for a **production** (on average), over the past 2 years?

***(figures to be appropriately altered for tier 2 & 3 cities. Whenever possible, the cost of personnel and material may be separated. E.g. Set designer charges and cost of sets.)

	Under 5000	5000 - 10000	10000 - 20000	20000 - 50000	Above 50000
Hall					
Sets					
Lights					
Sound					
Costumes					
Properties					
Make-up					
Music					
Rehearsal Space					
Cast / Crew Payments					
Transport					
Publicity					
Refreshments					
Copyright					
Licenses and Taxes					
Other (please specify)					

TOTAL					
-------	--	--	--	--	--

III. QUESTIONS RELATED TO FUNDING & COSTS ******(You may use the responses to the above table as a way of beginning the discussion)

1. Would you rather have spent less in some areas of production?

Which ones? Why?

2. Did you feel the money was used in the best possible way? Please explain.

3. Have there been any significant changes in your expenditure over the recent past (2 years)?

If so, what are they?

What are the reasons for this change?

3. In your most recent production, what sources of funding did you have access to? **(DO NOT Probe)**

4. How do you meet your expenses for a production, in general?

IV. QUESTIONS RELATED TO PRODUCTIONS & PERFORMANCE

1. Do you feel that the number of productions in the city/town have increased/decreased over the recent past? Why?

***Probe possible reasons.

2. Are you performing as much as you would like to?

***Probe possible reasons for performance/non performance.

V. QUESTIONS PERTAINING TO PERFORMANCE SPACES **(*Common questions for the actors/dancer/technician as well as Director/Producer. Please note responses separately)**

1. Are there performance spaces- theatres, auditoria, that you would like to use but can't for some reason?

i. Can you name them?

ii. What may the reasons why you cannot use them?

2. Which is the most utilized performance venue in your town/city?

Reasons?

3. Do you feel that this venue is available when you need it?

- Reasons (for availability/non availability)

4. *Which is the best equipped performance space in the town/ city?
 - i. What makes it the best (list the features)
 - ii. What are its highlights?
 - iii. What is the approach and attitude of the management ?
 - iv. Does the management play a facilitating role in making the venue available to performers? If so, what? If not, why not?
3. *Which is the most ill equipped performance space which continues to be used by you?
 - i. Why is it still used?
 - ii. What makes it ill equipped? (specific details)
4. What are major policy issues (rules, management's approach, etc.) you face with regard to performance spaces / rehearsal spaces?
5. *Are there any difficulties (technical or otherwise) that are common to all the spaces in the town/city? Pl. be specific.
6. *Can you comment on the quality of facilities in the theatres/auditoria in the city? Pl. give feedback on the facilities provided, including green rooms, toilets, quick-change rooms etc.
7. *What are some of the problems you have had with rehearsal spaces you have used?
8. *What recurring technical problems do your productions face?
9. *What are the strategies used to overcome them?
10. *In terms of infrastructure which areas do *you* think need immediate attention?
11. Are there ongoing projects / ventures that address this area/s of concern?
12. *Do you think that over the past 10 years or so, there has been efforts made to support, build and nurture appropriate venues for performance? Pl. comment.
13. *Do you feel that those who manage theatres are tending to become more accommodative in order to encourage performances and groups such as yours?
14. How many people in your group have undergone some training in acting / technical skills? From where?
15. *Can you describe your **Ideal** or Dream performance space?

VI. ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR ACTORS/DANCERS/TECHNICIANS

1. As an actor/dancer/technician, what are the practical problems you face while doing a production? (**Probe problems that may be related to infrastructure- greenrooms, change rooms, facilities for lights, etc).**)
2. What are strategies you use to overcome them?
3. At the time of preparation (rehearsals) and actual performance -
 - a. What Best supports your efforts/performance?
 - b. What Most blocks your effort/performance?

(Probe details related to infrastructure and facilities- like "rehearsal spaces too far away", "there are pillars in the rehearsal space, therefore we can't move", "hall has good sound design"..etc)

5. As a performer, can you describe a moment that gave you immense delight?

Can you tell us something about that particular venue that made this moment of delight possible for you?