

Voices from the Field 2020

An Overview of the Scenarios and Needs for Current Creative, Infrastructural and Support for the Performance Arts and Literature in India

A report by **Sammitha Sreevathsa**

Introduction

Once every five to six years, IFA undertakes a multi-pronged review of its grant programmes in order to reshape and recalibrate them according to the changing requirements of the field. This report has been commissioned with an objective to provide an overview of the current creative and infrastructural needs in the field of performing arts in India. By taking online and telephonic interviews of artists from across the spectrum of music, dance and theatre, this report seeks to represent the concerns, challenges, needs and aspirations of the performing artists across the country. As the name suggests, *Voices from the field*, draws on the artists' perception of the field and of IFA's current Arts Practice programme.

This report comes at a moment when the performing artists are economically, socially and psychologically grappling with the crisis of Covid-19 pandemic. The pool of financial capital they can draw from is rapidly shrinking. As the stage beneath their feet has slipped and they are left without access to performance venues and gatherings, performing artists from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds have been pushed to rearrange their career in a newly structured world.

As one might expect in the face of a crisis, **the pressing need is that of survival**, therefore making the **role of a funding body as a provider** more relevant than ever. There are artists who have had to temporarily renounce their career in the arts to find alternative means to earn a living and some others who have had to cut down on their meals. **These concerns of the field call for the responsibility of the funder to be reconsidered, where supporting livelihood must be prioritized over rewarding excellence.**

However, for many artists interviewed, working from home was not entirely unwelcome. One of the participants pointed out, that a definite "discovery" of the digital has led to a collective realization that it is possible to generate a career while being at home. These realizations, some believe, will remain a part of their work in future irrespective of the status of the pandemic. There have **also been some unexpected outfalls of this pandemic**. Artists especially with a **classical background believe that this crisis has provoked some of the first articulations of personal insecurities and vulnerabilities in the otherwise silent field of classical arts.**

The conversations with the artists reveal an array of challenges that they face while approaching a funding body for availing support. The practitioner's perspective of the field gives an entry into common issues that concern all the artists as well as singular issues that emerge from the specific contexts that they are situated in. The challenges and criticisms shared by the artists included some of the following points: **the bias of the funding bodies towards written proposals, aesthetic preferences of the funding body, inferiority complex of not belonging to metropolitan cities, lack**

of funding availability for their area of specialization and expectation of a promised artistic outcome prior to beginning of the process.

These challenges also point the funding bodies in some directions to contemplate and later alter (if needed) their modes of soliciting applications, their eligibility criteria and evaluation processes. While the **artists across the field asked for a friendlier grant application process**, they unanimously commended the role that IFA has played over the years in supporting risk-taking, innovative art projects and artists. IFA was also recognized for the accountability and transparency with which they administer their grants. According to one of the participants, “IFA’s arts practice programme serves a long standing need as a funding source outside the purview of state bureaucracy and patronage. In a way, it is a hope/reassurance that several in the arts community cherish, irrespective of whether they have availed the funding or not”. **The fact that such a review was being conducted was recognized as a possible opening for a longer dialogue and was largely appreciated.**

The participant’s criticisms of the existing modes of soliciting applications reflect how they perceive their **relationship with the funding body i.e. as unequal by default where funding bodies are more powerful than the artists**. However, though many felt that the primary onus is on the funding body to reach out without implying threat and make the process inclusive, equal and democratic there were voices that also observed that **artists should also seek new networks and make an effort to look beyond their own circles**.

Other than articulating the challenges involved in availing grants, the participants also shed light on issues related to - the various trends in art funding that are counterproductive, the areas in their respective fields **that funding bodies have overlooked and most importantly their suggestions to IFA on how some of these ignored issues plaguing the arts for a relatively long period of time could be addressed**.

List of Participants

Sl. No.	Name	Details	Mode of Interview
1.	Sadique Hossain	Literary person, Bengali writer from rural Bengal	Written
2.	Shaili Sathyu	Founder and Director of Gillo theatre, specializes in children’s theatre from Mumbai	Zoom
3.	Kaustubh Naik	Goan Marathi playwright and doctoral student at U-Penn	Written
4.	Vidya Shah	Vocalist in Hindustani music, social activist.	Zoom
5.	Satish Alekar	Marathi playwright, actor, theatre director from Pune. Founding member of Theatre Academy of Pune	Zoom
6.	Revathi A	Activist, author and theatre person, works on the rights of sexual minorities from Tamil Nadu	Telephone
7.	Swarnamalya Ganesh	Dancer, film actor and academic, teaches at	Zoom

		Krea University.	
8.	Jagadeesh Ramanujam	Bangalore based musician, director of Bangalore School of Music	Written
9.	Rudy Wallang	Musician and songwriter from Meghalaya, member of a blues rock band	Written
10.	Veecheet Dhakal	Violinist, vocalist and film-maker based out of Bangalore	Telephone
11.	Manasi Prasad	Singer and arts manager, Director of Indian Music Experience based out of Bangalore	Zoom
12.	Shravana Heggodu	Puppeteer based out of Heggodu	Telephone
13.	Rutuja Lad	Hindustani Vocalist, currently a visiting faculty at SNDT University	Zoom
14.	Amitesh Grover	Performance based artist, curator, educator from New Delhi, currently a faculty at NSD	Telephone
15.	Venu Vasudevan	Theatre and Arts manager from Kerala	Zoom audio
16.	Vikram Phukan	Theatre and Arts Journalist from Mumbai	Written
17.	Champa Shetty	Theatre artist from Bangalore	Telephone

Methodology

All the interviews were conducted over phone, through the digital interface of Zoom or as written interviews. A questionnaire with a list of fourteen questions on the nature of funding in performing arts was prepared and circulated to the participants before the interview. This report is essentially a compilation of the responses of 17 artists to these questions. The participants were a mix of artists from music, theatre, literature and dance background. These artists were in different stages in their career- there were some who had known and followed IFA's work over the years as well as others who had not heard about IFA until the interview. A more detailed list of participants and their background can be found at the end of this document.

Emergent Needs in the Performing Arts

- Sustenance:** Many artists echoed that "*Roti, Kapda and Makaan*" is literally the most pressing need of the field today. To bring the performing arts sector back on its feet it is imperative that for some time the funding becomes completely need-based, first-come-first-serve basis. One of the participants who also has a background in the social sector speaks of a terminology called "affirmative action". She says that "it simply translates to prioritizing the people for whom art is survival and livelihood in the most fundamental way. At the moment one needs to begin with offering support to those who are in most need and then move upwards. It is often overlooked that the artists from the marginalized sector are the ones that are holding up the structure of this artistic community in many ways." This work, she says, will also involve challenging the government's definition of "marginalized" in the arts which operates on the flawed basis of the art form and not on the basis of the artists themselves. Many people with a lot of social capital and privilege often end up receiving grants for promoting marginalized art forms.

- **Marginalized artists are looking for grants/fellowship (not just charity):** Conversation with a theatre person from a marginalized background reveals that the transgender artists as well as marginalized artists who earn on a seasonal basis have barely managed to sustain and have been forced to cut down on meals and constantly request the house owners for delay in rent payment. Prior to the pandemic, her troupe sustained on social awareness shows which they performed in education institutes, these opportunities have now dried up. She emphasizes that other than funds that were organized by T. M. Krishna; no other funding body has come forward to offer support. They are open to doing shows on digital medium by sourcing technological support from the younger generation within their community. Either a grant or a fellowship to carry forward their work while also sustaining them through this rough patch is the urgent need.
- **Conversations on how to phase into work:** Although it is evident that artists cannot wait for the pandemic to end to re-enter work life - both online and offline, there are not many conversations around *how* one can phase back. A theatre practitioner expresses her concern about not knowing how to resurface. The moment calls for the community to brainstorm on different logistic challenges as well as financial challenges they will face while rephasing. For instance, she says “enclosed auditorium is something performers will not be able to use and even if open air performances become possible, it involves a lot of red tape such as taking much permission from the local government body which involves spending the funding to bribe the way through. Open air performances often happen for free. What will be the economics of this scenario? For all of this we need to first talk to each other, and then elect representatives who can further be in conversation with the government bodies to enable artists to have a democratic, regulated phasing back.”

Another participant with a music background feels that certain aspects of the emerging digital culture must not become a new normal. The arts community needs to discuss how to set new precedents for monetizing their work. There is a need to discuss how we can evolve different financial models and share it with each other so that free work doesn't become the new normal. “Though we began by putting out our work for free online there has been a steady shift towards paid digital work. People who run various online pages have started to offer remuneration when they invite artists to perform” she said.

- **Digital empowerment:** Over the last few months it has become very clear that artists cannot shun the digital platform anymore. Therefore training people to occupy digital spaces has become necessary. Not just training people who have access, but training those without access by taking digital platforms to them is critical. This will involve a few steps like first training the trainers in different fields who can then take this knowledge to more number of people.
- **Data Collection:** To be able to articulate the needs of the field in concrete terms it is important to first know the field quantitatively and qualitatively. Today there are so many universities in India with departments of performing arts across the country which offer graduate and even post graduate courses in performing arts. A senior theatre practitioner who is particularly keen on data collection feels convinced that funding bodies need to invest in it. He says “It will be useful to compile a data report with details of - *How many performing arts departments are there in state universities, what kind of training centres are available, what is the condition of these training centres, what kind curriculum are they offering, what infrastructure they have?*” Other than the urban centres, there are also rural

traditions which we have no data about. There are inter-generational traditional groups who have been active for over a hundred years. But we do not know how exactly they sustain themselves, what is their vision for their own tradition. This exercise is important so that the artist community can concretely articulate how existing resources can be mobilized and shared.

- **Training:** In the absence of performance opportunities many artists have taken this time to train themselves in new skills. However, some participants are also skeptical about this attitude towards upskilling during pandemic, because “learning needs to come pre-engineered into the cycle of our lives as artists and not something we “add” to our personality during a pandemic”, as one of them said.

The need for training was also interpreted on by some theatre practitioners as a need to professionalize and institutionalize training in theatre. Theatre, one of the participants said, “is being increasingly treated as a stepping stone into film or TV serial acting. There is also a tendency to think that acting in four plays is enough to make one an actor.”

- **Networking:** “It is only an illusion that we are all well-connected” says a senior theatre practitioner. It is important to realize we are actually greatly disconnected to people than connected. There is a need to get in touch with people outside of the regular social circuits. Another young theatre practitioner from rural Karnataka says “Especially for those of us who come from a rural context, to encounter diverse crowds in performing arts becomes twice unlikely. The plays produced in cities rarely tour rural parts of the country and rural plays rarely get opportunities to perform in city auditorium. Rural performance should be encouraged if we want to break the same cycle of network.” He says that he hasn’t been able to take his own shows to rural areas because he does not have the bandwidth to fund it on his own. So he keeps performing in Rangashankara and same kind of people watch and have similar things to say all the time.

He also suggests that the funding bodies offer the service of connecting specifically the early career artists with the right people because artists spend significant amount of their career looking for the right people to work with.

- **Large-scale mobilization to seek state support for infrastructure:** For a Delhi based educator and theatre artist, the need in the performing arts is for a large scale mobilization to build support and infrastructure for performing arts. He believes that there should be community centres in every neighbourhood which has an annual calendar of events and is run by the government at district level. The performing arts also need training centres in every state. In his words, “This has to be done with public money and political intent. For it to manifest it has to go to the parliament, it has to have political will and many cultural organizations have to get together to find a representative who can petition a bill for this. No generational change can happen unless we submit out state policy and central ministry of culture completely to infrastructure at the district level and training centre at state levels. In this country unfortunately it is something which we will never be able to build. Again somebody who will do this research will come and ask me “what is the need in arts” and again I will say the same thing. I’ve been giving this answer for 10 years and nothing has happened. There are people who were doing great work but all of that does not even make for a drop in the scale of what is really needed for the arts in this country.”

Factors that tend to attract funding:

For many participants, the question of what kind of work attracts funding boils down to whether funding supports art projects or whether the art projects have to be designed to attract funding. This skepticism of whether the artists have to pander to the requirements of the funding body cut across all questions around eligibility.

- **Visibility for the funders:** The artists especially from the music context were of the opinion that many projects that get money are the ones that hold a promise of maximum visibility for the funders. Corporate sponsors support only when they know they are getting a certain mileage for their company. So the mainstream concert formats tend to get maximum money because it offers a huge audience base for sponsors to be visible.
- **Preference for bankable outputs:** Straightforward outputs have always gotten easy sponsorship. The intention of the sponsors is not to sustain the arts and the artists in a deeper sense. These gala events which are often financially heavy and even wasteful invite only prominent artists from classical or entertainment industry. A vocalist among the participants says “The corporate funders keep inviting the very famous singers from the entertainment industry. How many times will you call Arijit Singh? He might be a great singer but he doesn’t need this opportunity. Corporate funders get to spend all their money at once and invite 10,000 people to one festival and get visibility. To organize many smaller events for talented but not so famous artists, with say 250 audience members involves more administrative work and thinking which is not something the corporate funders care about. But that is what will push the boundaries of art as well as make sure money is going into the right pockets.”
- **Relevant keywords:** Every year there are buzz words or key words that many funding bodies put out and the artists are forced to modify their projects to suit these key words. One of the dancers’ confesses that she often feels compelled to “toss in some key words” into her proposals to increase her likelihood of getting the grant. Moreover, she recalls how there are seasons for trending themes and all grants want you to work around that. “There was a year when everyone was asking for work around Tagore. And I did not want to work on Tagore. Of course with covid-19, a whole bunch of words too shall become a part of the popular key words”. Another theatre artist felt that granting bodies have made a virtue out of “multi-disciplinary”. She says “There are many artists who might want to work deeper in the grammar that they are comfortable with. These are not healthy trends.”
- **Nepotism:** There is a general “feeling” among artists across different performing arts that the same 15 to 20 popular artists receive grants from different funding bodies. “It is possible that these artists are doing something right” a theatre artist says, “but this conversely makes me wonder whether I am doing something wrong.” Funding bodies need to ask themselves whether famous artists who come with a promise of great work are the only ones that deserve funding.
- **Topical Ideas:** A theatre director contends “that funding agencies work a lot by optics and metrical criteria rather than what is intrinsic to an artist’s creative impulses or their output/oeuvre. This is a gray area since a work of art is constantly molting, but it is important that only lip-service to topical ideas are not rewarded. An artist’s motivations should be coaxed to the surface in more than just the articulation of ideas. It is an area in which artistic truth is rarely seen for what it is.”

Trends in the proportional availability of funding for different streams in the performing arts: dance, theatre, music

Most participants did not feel equipped to respond to this question with conviction but were guided by the hunch that the three fields have their own financial ecosystems. Theatre, by virtue of being (a) a collaborative practice and (b) a community with one foot in the social sector, seeks grants from funding bodies and requires systemic funding. Music runs on sponsorship and is perhaps the only performing art that has adapted to the mainstream media in a significant way. Dance (especially classical dance) is patronized by a wealthy community and hence dancers are not interested in going through the rigmarole of applications.

However, irrespective of the field, the participants see a value in applying for funding because it accounts for a good, critical evaluation of their project. According to one of the participants, “applying for funding is a good practice, because it is a way of putting one’s idea through a critical analysis process and there is a third eye that is evaluating what is the value that your work produces. For an artist keen on promoting their work in a professional manner it is best to go through the process of applying for funding even if it is a rejection at the end of it.”

Challenges that artists face in availing funding

a) Limitations in setting of the eligibility criteria, evaluation process and modes of soliciting applicants

- **The eligibility criteria cannot become canonical:** The process of scouting for the right grantee is the most critical work for a funding body. They are inadvertently gate-keepers, now how and who they throw open the gates to has to be a very labour intensive, democratic process. This has to be done with an acute awareness of the fact that setting of eligibility criteria will be limiting the scope of many therefore the effort should be to articulate the criteria in the most inclusive way.
- **Why is a proposal based application process limiting?:** IFA's application process acts as a gatekeeper, “not only because there's a certain manner in which the application has to be written and that skill might not be uniformly available to each applicant, but it also expects the artist to justify the project and its outcomes even before the project has gone on the floor”, says a participant with a theatre background. Yet another theatre person believes that “The creative process is a fluid one, maybe a funded artist who has a great track record might not do well next time, or someone who hasn’t done great work before might come up with a very powerful script for a play. It is unpredictable.” A written proposal, which is anyway not the medium of the artist, must not be a testimony to the potential of an artist.
- **Accepting multi-language proposals is not inclusive enough:** Artists from across the three disciplines believe that the barrier one hits while applying is not of language alone. Literacy and skill, even to write in a regional language is not available to all. Psycho-social factors such as the inferiority complex that comes with difficulty of articulation in an appealing way, fear of a perceived “high culture” inhibits artists from diverse backgrounds to apply. An artist from rural Karnataka says “Many times we feel dejected even before we apply because we feel like we can never write a proposal good enough to get a grant”. This can be broken only when the “officiousness” of the proposal application is put aside and artists are

spoken to, in their comfort zones. Yet another writer from a rural background said “I write stories/novels in my regional language. Last 15 years I have practicing this art form and my English/Hindi is not good. I came to know about funders in the last 2 to 3 years. Before that I had not any idea of it at all. But the most important thing is that even after knowing about funders, I still don’t know how to approach them!”

- **Aesthetic Elitism:** Most funding bodies preempt the aesthetic value of the work that the artist produces. Their own aesthetic sensibilities tend to drive who their grantee will be and they must not impose their aesthetic values on the creative process of the performer. “People come from everywhere and with all kinds of aesthetic sensibilities. While developing funds, it is not fair for funders to foresee or expect their kind of aesthetics in the art that’s being created.” Whatever is the aesthetic outcome of the project has to be left with the artist or the person who is creating.
- **The hassle of paperwork is heavy on marginalized groups:** A theatre artist speaks about how the hassle of paper work is twice more challenging for marginalized artists who often organize themselves as informal groups and perform seasonally. They are asked by most funding bodies for paper work regarding their registration and audit. To find support they need to reach out to NGOs which in turn either ask for a cut or ask for visibility both of which come at the cost of their own money and visibility (which they have to struggle for as marginalized artists).
- **Fraudulent Practices:** Many people, who get money from local funding bodies, plagiarize and indulge in dishonest modes to get the money. For example, Kannada Matthu Samskriti Ilake, has a very loose system of application – “video kaLisi, photo KaLasi” – in this mode of applying many people end up cheating the system. People within the system are corrupt themselves and end up supporting fraudulent applications because they favour certain applicants over others. Two of the participants with a background in regional theatre say that often public money goes waste on projects which never come to life. One of them recounts his experience as a victim of a fraudulent practice. “This one person, who would regularly visit our shows in village as “photographer”, took a lot of our show’s photos and photo shopped it and used it for his application. So people generally feel getting anywhere close to govt. funding bodies is a problem. In our villages, as soon as they get to know that you’re applying for funding – people start rumours that you’re involved in illegal scheme “dud hoDiyokke””. This has led to a general stigma around applying for funding itself.
- **Expectations from the artist also depend upon the funding body’s equation with the corporate world:** Funding bodies usually get their capital under CSR and it is a challenging kind of bureaucracy one has to deal with because they are answerable to corporate bodies. If this equation is made easier for the funding bodies, perhaps they can also simplify or devise modifications into their eligibility criteria for the artists. As a creative person, one must not have to give details beyond ones’ artistic vision for a proposed project and history of creative work. This should be the ideal case scenario but of course it’s not like that. The rules are stringent on the artist because the funding body’s equation with the corporate bodies. Consequently the funding body’s equation with artist doesn’t work on trust but works on the papers.

- **Government funding prefers cultural tropes:** The government is more inclined to fund cultural performances. According to an artist from north east “being from Meghalaya, for example, the cultural troupes tend to get hired more often for performances in the NE as well as outside and abroad.”

b) Setbacks and Privileges that impact the artist’s chances of availing the funding

- **Political orientation** definitely plays a role in government grants. An arts manager and theatre person from Kerala says “We must be aware of the change in the state funding pattern where increasingly most work government funds look for projects with subtext of strong ideologies that suits the government.” The other extreme is when many funding bodies expect artists to sign a document declaring their non- affiliation to any specific political party. “You may not be affiliated but you may support their ideology. Then what does it mean to say you don’t support any political party. Such forceful declarations are authoritarian because then you’re either a lie on the form or you don’t apply!”

Political views of an artist will come through but it may not be advisable for a granting body to look for political ideologies that align with theirs. As an organization, they must represent diverse voices even though as individuals they are likely to have political opinions of their own. A funding body identifying with specific politics will encourage artists to profile grant body and then manipulate their proposal.

- **Age limit:** It takes a long time to build expertise in performing arts and by the time you do it, you’re probably not eligible to apply for a grant.

Gaps in the arts funding

- **Early career artists support:** Participants from across all three disciplines recognized the need to build a support system for the early career artists to help them find a foot in the field. A senior theatre person advocates for setting up of a “salary grant” where an early career artist can avail a basic stipend for a year to build some work. A similar suggestion was offered by a participant from music background who felt that tie-ups with educational institutions which offer degrees in performing arts might be very useful. “May be the students could be encouraged to gear up towards one of the grants in their final year. I think if I were told of these grants as a student, I might have imagined my career in music differently.” This might include help in networking, training them to think critically about their own work and push the boundaries of their field.

Though someone within the classical arts may find support in her own family, to know that she will be heard and her work can find support outside family is important for her to venture more. It will help break this kind of familial economic structure within the field and also open up the imagination of what a career in the arts might look like other than standard performances and teaching.

- **Funding for Children’s Theatre - Children’s theatre is serious theatre:** Children’s theatre does not get taken seriously as art. A senior theatre practitioner with a specialization in children’s theatre finds that there is little funding available for this rather neglected field. “Art funders like to say that it is a part of education, education sector feels this is not serious education but arts. It tends to get little funding in social sectors but it is a matter of

advocacy and how you are being perceived. Children are not taken seriously and by extension so is children's theatre."

Artists are also to blame for this attitude. She says "In the last 40-50 years, children's theatre has been used by artists to kick start their own career and then give up on it. It works as a training ground for people looking to start a career in theatre for some time. So lot of the work in children's theatre tends to be substandard. Neither research nor pedagogy is evolved in the Indian context. Consequently, all research in this area comes from UK and Germany. So much work of putting together case studies needs to be done in the Indian context. It is a completely separate area with a lot of overlaps with theatre in general but definitely needs urgent attention. Unfortunately many senior theatre practitioners in their 50s or 60s who were once in children's theatre and looked down upon it are now decision makers in funding bodies. And they don't seem to understand that children's theatre now is not the same as it was 30 yrs ago."

- **NSD shouldn't be the only option:** In Karnataka there are some well established institutions for learning acting, which equip the students with a certificate. Even if the student doesn't become a performer, there are facilities to absorb them as a teacher. But allied professions like design in theatre, does not get attention in these traditional institutes. Same with Puppetry, the only option one can think of to learn allied skills is NSD.

Many times one may want to learn from a traditional art master who might be living in an obscure village. But this education too needs to be recognized. There is little scope for decentralization or true dissemination of knowledge unless such diverse kinds of education are recognized. People who do go to NSD, have never returned to the villages. They prefer to get absorbed in the esoteric network. They have been called many times to join as faculty back in local institutes. So that is why alternative learning careers within the arts need funding. Otherwise the community will not grow.

- **Instrument makers and accompanists are music makers:** There is a hierarchical way of viewing people in the music field where accompanists and instrument makers are considered secondary. Both these groups of people have taken a hard hit during the pandemic. With the virtual becoming the only performance platform, digital sounds are being used to stand in for accompanying artists, we have lost the collaborative spirit of singing with fellow "*sangatkars*". One cannot overlook the role of accompanying artists in our rush to perform online. Music is an interdependent dependent community and therefore even the feeling that you're missing out on others is a necessary feeling, so we know digital sound cannot replace that feeling. It changes the music making experience. Even the instrument makers and instrument shops feel irrelevant because of similar reasons. They should become more central to our imagination of music itself.
- One of the participants, who is a theatre person from Kerala, believes that the arts in India can be broadly grouped in three categories - the strictly traditional arts, the contemporary cutting edge arts which are interdisciplinary and the modern arts such as conventional theatre which take inspiration from many traditions but function in a contemporary context. The third category might not be cutting edge or push boundaries but, he believes, they play a critical role in keeping theatre alive and unfortunately their presence is vastly overlooked.

Recommendations

- **Diversifying the modes for soliciting applications:** The standard protocol followed by most granting bodies is to expect the artists to come to the funders with a written proposal. Written applications are biased towards literacy and skill of writing, both of which need not a pre-requisite for a performing artist. More diverse modes of application inclusive of formal and informal interactions, visuals and even performances should be made space for. Funding bodies must also consider the less popular way, where they reach out to the artists and offer funding. This can be done either by organizing workshops or festivals where they invite the artist to participate and converse with them informally. The funding body's equation with the artist should work on trust and not on papers. Experts in specific arts should visit the artist and watch the performances.
- **Rethinking the cultural politics and policies of the arts:** There has been a moment of reckoning with the ongoing BlackLivesMatter movement across the globe and it is imperative that bodies like IFA think through the questions it has raised in the context of arts in India. For long, arts practices has involved artists appropriating and benefitting from living traditions and knowledge of the indigenous, oppressed caste communities. As a funding body, it is important that IFA reconfigures their scope of funding to represent the diverse nature of arts practitioners of India across caste and class divides. Secondly, IFA needs to rethink its ethical standpoints on issue of knowledge appropriation that happens through the arts and devise a funding policy accordingly.
- **Cross-location performances:** IFA must encourage cross-location performances as a way to encourage greater exchange between urban and rural. This can perhaps be done by making cross location performances a part of their grant criteria so that the artists can begin including non-urban audiences in their performance making process.
- **Bridge Programs:** Different kinds of bridge programs could be introduced to help artist community engage in more critical work. The artistic community doesn't actively engage in diverse modes of critical thinking unless they have a specific kind of training in humanities. Researchers and practitioners are almost two different worlds. If there can be a support for projects that encourage a bridging of gap between the two, where they work with each other, it would enrich the cultural field.
- **Community Building:** There is a culture among theatre people to not engage in each others' work or watch each other's plays. This is a very myopic attitude towards one's own career. Maybe grant making bodies can enable non-threatening platforms where artists become more empathetic towards each other and engage with each other's artistic processes. Being aware of different ways of working, different interpretations of your own work, and helps in enriching you. Arts is supposed to be about empathy and while everyone struggles to invoke empathy among audience but if they do not show it towards each other then its' lost it's point.
- **To assign a producing partner:** Funding is always about funding production. Most often the artists do not end up spending exactly the way they would have declared the expenditure to be. The "miscellaneous" is where maximum funding might end up getting spent and at that point, it will be necessary to have someone with whom a grantee could

share this without fear. This makes accountability easier and help navigate towards optimizing the opportunity for the artist as well as the funder.

- **Eligibility Criteria must alter during the Pandemic:** The funding needs to reach those who cannot reach the funding. “During theatre productions, many people travel a long way to do a day’s work and collect their wage. For such people this is a very bad time but they’re not even present in our imagination of art or art funding. One must not mistake them as artists without a vision but they are people who have been stuck in production work for many years.” These are the people who will never apply due to many psycho-social inhibitions but their contribution needs to be recognized and compensated.
- **Conversations on Mental Health:** Mental health is connected to the larger structures of power in the arts which allows for abuse and violence. Sensitivity to mental health includes working towards making the arts a more equal space where hierarchies are not so rigid. Though classical dance and music are known to be very hierarchical communities, one cannot ignore theatre. Theatre- directors tend to assume they have been given permission to be rude and manipulative. They are known to do things like pit actors against each other to get the best out of them. Perhaps funding bodies can encourage conversations that work through these structures to make sure that artists are a healthier community. One of the participants suggests that “Funders must definitely impose standards of safety when it comes to artist engagement. Because this is an unorganised field, most theatre groups do not have any systems of mental health care set up, and can be potential minefields to negotiate. Funders should definitely ensure a non-exploitative work environment — and apart from a group’s creative track record, its processes should also come within the ambit of auditing.”
- **A co-operative response to failure:** When productivity is seen as a goal, the idea of success becomes very skewed. Idea of success is and should be highly diverse and variable. However, to quell any fear of failure, participants suggest that funding bodies can perhaps create a system of guidance for the artist. Moreover, funding bodies should know that art making needs a certain degree of freedom to take risk and fail. This risk of failure is therefore something that a funding body has to be willing to share.

Conclusion

This task of reviewing the changing needs of the field and the role of the funding body in it was taken up seven months into the pandemic; when most artists, having survived the initial shock of it, were looking for means to rehabilitate and reinstate their work both digitally and otherwise. Given that it is an extraordinary moment for the arts, this report tilts heavily towards the experiences shaped by this crisis. What has become very clear from the participants responses, is that the performing arts while being seen as diverse field is also being increasingly recognized as an unequal one in many ways. Majority of participants spoke not only from personal experience but from a shared space, of being witness to the struggles and needs of the fellow artists, colleagues and friends. There is a definite awareness of lopsided distribution of infrastructural and financial resources. Given the scale of crisis, it might be useful for the arts practice programme IFA to reduce their per grantee amount but offer it to more number of artists (halving the amount can double the number of grantees). It is likely that the creative “outputs” would be either virtually shared or shared with a physically distanced small audience. Imagining artistic engagements which

are not too resource heavy and which fits within smaller budgets could be one small step forward in the long marathon.

Appendix I: Questionnaire

1. What is your opinion on IFA's current Arts Practice programme?

<http://indiaifa.org/programmes/arts-practice/request-for-proposals.html>

2. What according to you are the specific emergent needs in the performing arts – in terms of training , capacity building, technology, infrastructure?

3. Is there a specific topic, type of practice or style of project that in your opinion is more attractive to funding agencies? Do you think the pandemic has altered / will alter some of these preferences for funders?

4. Are there visible trends in the proportional availability of funding for these streams in the performing arts: dance, theatre, music?

5. Are there major variations in how funding bodies operate, for example in the setting of eligibility criteria, evaluation processes or modes of soliciting applicants?

6. Are there factors such as an artist's age and/or politics, the medium adopted, or nature of their practice that negatively impact the likelihood of attracting funding? Conversely, are there certain privileges of language, city living, or educational background that help in accessing funding?

7. To what extent, if any, is regional geography and language a determining factor in grant allocation?

8. Who are the funding agencies that you are aware of, who engage with the risk of supporting the development of new work? By contrast, which funders are more invested in supporting work where the performance is a bankable output?

9. How do funders perceive and respond to 'failure' in your field?

10. What according to you are the gaps in arts funding, specifically in your field, that need attention?

11. What are your expectations from a funder like IFA?

12. Apart from financial aid, in which ways could a funder help your projects?

12. Given the current situation, what do you see as the short and long term challenges facing the performing arts?

13. What do you see as the new opportunities that have arisen due to the current situation?

14. In the present time, that has foregrounded concerns around mental health and the need to address them, what role can funders play in this regard?