Priya Srinivasan Independent Scholar/Artist Sangam Arts

My presentation asks what dissent means in Naarm (Melbourne Australia) stages, with the understanding that we live on stolen unceded lands that continue to be colonised. I examine the complexity of power relations between South Asian bodies and whiteness to work towards cultural and racial equity in the arts. The arts sector in Melbourne remains deeply divided with primarily white Euro Centric practices literally and metaphorically in the center stages and South Asian arts in the margins. With white / contemporary or classical (as defined by the Euro American center) practices obtaining funding, production support, and professionalisation. Despite South Asians being the highest minority population in Australia and the state of Victoria, nowhere are the stages representative of this statistic. In staging a large festival that complicates power relationships, troubles gender/ sexuality/ patriarchy/ caste/ class and the category of South Asia within Australia, Sangam proposes a new and equitable model of praxis that uses dissent in productive terms while understanding that irreconcilable differences continue to fracture the communities from which these artists emerge. I focus on a few examples of performances that artists in the festival have presented, from spoken word, stand up comedy, experimental performances, to classical dance, Carnatic and Hindustani music performed by Muslim, Sikh, Sri Lankan, Mauritian, Fijian Indian, Malaysian first / second generation cis gender/ gueer/ trans drag artists sometimes on the same platform. I use these examples to highlight the possibilities of transformation that dialogic performance might enable in the continuous making and unmaking of new South Asian solidarities.