

CHAPTER 5

Imperatives of New Liberal Economy as a Crucial Input in the Construction of Women's Issues through Theatre.

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization has been connected with basic spheres of transformation in Economics, Market, Politics, Language, Culture, and Traditions, which have headed towards a marked makeover of the global order. At the echelon of political process, the deregulation and liberalization has directed to an obvious attenuation of the state and has also led to a common postulation that every state, all the where, is required to turn out to be democratic and assure good governance over their populace. In the field of economy, globalization has been linked with the approach towards escalating non-interventionism on the part of the state out and out deregulation. This has rippled in unbound trade and more delimited labour, commodities and fiscal markets. The fundamentals of the New Economic Policy which have generated accredits to the advancements of Indian economy comprises Privatization, Globalization, Modernization and enhancing efficiency and expansion rate. Globalization, in India, is by and large in use to denote 'amalgamating' the national economy with the world economy.

Globalization, beyond hesitation, has presented incredible opportunities. But what has been the bearing of globalization upon women? Scholars and academics remain divided over the issue, with a faction accentuating the advantageous facets of globalization and claiming that women in general have gained from developments in the global economy, while some other faction emphasize upon the negative impressions of globalization on the whole which rope in, if is not restricted to, a refutation of rights of women, even to an extent of basic human rights.

As the deep rooted impact of Globalization and the New Liberal Economy in the traditional social structure and ethos, the positions of women in India have been shifting and they are at present up-and-coming from the previous traditions into a pristine epoch of autonomy and rights. The evidence is visible ubiquitously; the assertions of women is ever more heard in Parliament, Courts and even in the streets. Regrettably, women in India are typically ignorant of their rights due to illiteracy and the domineering social rituals and institutions. Since generations India remained a civilization where the male is exceedingly venerated. Ladies, get incredibly diminutive status in society, here. The fall out of globalization has not been able to bring much the desired alteration in the standings of women in India, especially from the unorganized segment. Furthermore, they have been acutely impaired by unemployment, prolonged toiling hours, displacements, family split ups, child labour, etc. While a section of women have come to benefit from the intensification of foreign capital investment, the large chunk of common women could manage no place to earn wage except the informal sectors.

Globalization, therefore, remained a mixed blessings as far as regards to the situation of women in India. In one half, most of the women find themselves shredded off from the state sponsored welfare policies of social security, benefits of subsidy, shield of labour rights etc., while on the other half, there were expanding scopes and potentials of better educational facilities and job openings at the transnational level that would reached the privileged few. Many commentators worry further, that globalization, in the form of assimilation of a nation into global society, will intensify gender discrimination. It may cause detriment to women economically through discrepancy supportive of male workers, expropriation of women in informal labour, exploitation of women by out and out low-wage, and penury by loss of conventional basis of income. It has caused further damage to women politically through segregation from the national and local political processes and has caused extreme harm to them culturally through seize of individuality and independence to a tremendously hegemonic global culture.

The adversative effect of globalization upon women's living, employment, health, etc has been brought to focus by several national and international study reports. Majority of these testimonies indicate the amplification of brutality against women; worsening of the health mechanism; proliferation in households headed by female as their men lost employments; attenuation in supply of resources to women; mounting total labour hours for women etc. Simultaneously, globalization has released wider communication channels and fetched new business corporations and international outfits into India. This imparts prospects not only for employed women, but also for those women who are appropriating themselves for a bigger portion of the personnel. New jobs offered higher pay for women, opportunities for promotion got enhanced, which, in turn, raised the self-confidence and brought about empowerment among women. This resulted in gender equality at the workplace, somewhat Indian women have been striving to achieve throughout their whole lives. Globalization has already uprooted the age-old outlooks towards women, encouraged and acknowledged them towards social leadership and has seeded a psyche by which they can express their own take on society, family, institutions and processes.

The contemporary improvement of technology proposes the potentials for women to correspond more uninterruptedly by means of networking both within and across countries. Computer aided information analysis system and user-friendly internet technology are being progressively more utilized by women at regular basis. The industrious competence of women in India has amplified "through access to capital, resources, credit, land, technology, information, technical assistance and training so as to raise their income". [Jaiswal, Ajit; *An Anthropological Vision on the Impact of Globalization on Indian Rural Women: A Critical Reality*; Arts and Social Science Journal; Vol. 5, Issue 2; July, 2014] This has guaranteed improved nutrition, better education and health care for them and has evolved their status within the household. The emancipation of women's capability is indispensable in the

contravention of the vicious cycle of poverty so that women can have their share in the benefits of socio-economic development and in the products of their own labour. While globalization brought forth a renewed identity for the new-age women in India, the image building of such potentially heightened woman as individual has undergone steady transformations in the realm of performing art since 1990s. As a matter of fact, the visible and celebrated change in the attributes of the performing art has altogether led to a revised methodology in envisioning women's issues on stage. However, modifying drifts in performing arts seldom exhibit themselves with vivid brusqueness. Usually they move stealthily and silently, distracting the stream of enduring traditions and rituals clandestinely but decisively. As the inexorable deluge of globalization stretched across the world in the last two decades of the Left Front rule in West Bengal, theatre as the major domain of performing arts here, too were swept, hurled from top to toe and thrown down, and devoid of notice by many, a quantity of the illustrious tributaries of performing traditions and systems of theatre had altered itinerary or, at times, been curbed vehemently. With hindsight on a few of these transformations, specifically in the sphere of Group Theatre's attempt to build the image of the new-age woman and issues related to their survival and aspirations, it may be worthwhile to scrutinize the creative enterprise of some acclaimed new-age women directors whose prominent aesthetic productions provide clues to understand some of the several ways in which globalization has influenced the Group Theatre activism on women's issues.

A minute assessment of the worldwide amusement industry, its background and stretches, would divulge finer specifics concerning the transformations steered by globalization. Steadfastly deep-rooted and unshakable in the notion of 'ever-increasing wealth of bits and pieces' by the prospects of international markets, globalization is forthright as regards to its fascination with bills and balances, turnovers and net takings. It would, therefore, appear as no flabbergast that even in the sphere of performing arts, the field that holds a testimony of generating alluring sale and money-spinning profit precincts, would be undoubtedly and effectively globalised. Thus, the reach variety of Group Theatre productions came into the

notice of multi-national corporations. Abandoned sponsorship and financial supports were extended to popular Groups who hold large scale sale of their productions across the nation and abroad. Telecom giant Hutchinson (Vodafone) invested millions in organizing Odeon Theatre Festival since 1995, ITC, the largest tobacco business house started sponsoring Rangyatra Theatre Festival prior to Hutch since 1992, Nandikar's own National Theatre Festival which started in 1994 were being backed by big business houses. Small scale sponsorships in multiple numbers throughout the state were being poured from multinational producers of liquor, soft drinks, cement, agro-chemicals, pharmaceuticals etc. Plenty of money were being offered to productions that would cast film and television actors performing live on stage. The craze for Bengali theatre was artificially pumped to a great extent. Of course, this was gradually replacing the hold of the ruling coalition in the state government over these Group Theatres who previously remained dependent on the government grants and accommodation in subsidized theatre halls to perform. There emerged a new set of young promising theatre intellectuals as actor, director, playwrights who started openly criticizing and questioning the Left Front government and the parties in the ruling coalition through their dramatic creations and in news media as well.

Globalization bring about its own series of contradictions. While in one hand, it searches for variety and miscellany to locate innovative constructs that may be made accessible for new and ever expanding markets, at the same time, it seeks a compromise between those assorted offerings with the designations, packaging and labels endorsed by global markets even to the cost of dropping their inimitable and distinctive identities and features. The thematic contents of Group Theatre productions, under the compulsion of choice of the sponsoring houses, were shifting from sending political messages to the audience towards depicting the value-crisis in middle class being performed in settings of 'drawing room drama'. Group Theatre movement gradually sacrificed its connections with the toiling mass and their struggle or politics at the center of the stage and became an industry of entertainment of attending middle class. The motives of propaganda and agitation

were pushed back to create larger space for the luxury of amusement. The saturated IPTA movement also lost its relevance amidst the glamorized theatre business that was expanding in the forms of repertories, company theatres, syndicates of theatre groups as brands (like the chain affairs of theatre under the branding of *Bratyajan* centering Bratya Basu, the noted actor, director, playwright of cinema, television and theatre world).

The imaginative and ingenious intellect is characterized by its faculty and talent to be matchless and idiosyncratic. Originality, consequently, appear from the unpretentious spontaneous aptitude of an artiste to be distinctive. In the contemporary globalised world, originality is enticed only till it can be used as unique selling point or USP. Thereafter, it is anticipated to gently correspond to the cut-out of promotion that are at present in vogue. Theatrical production on women's issues is no exception to this. With the advent of a perennial globalization and its tentacles in the Group Theatre culture in West Bengal, a potential makeover has been evident in the making of theatres on women' issues. Several women director, dramatist came to surface featuring the required USP while reflecting women's issues through their works. They were no Catholics to conform their outlook with the patriarchal attitude and set up of Group Theatres, rather they challenged it stoutly.

5.2. PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN'S THEATRE IN WEST BENGAL DURING THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

Amongst the stimulating ambience of the mid to late-1990s, socially relevant theatres based on women's issues embark on to open the way forward. Several tabooed and proscribed issues discovered manifestation and articulation through theatre. By the mid-1990's, women's question loomed large in Bengal's theatre scene in a diversified language and presentation. In the form of the experimental theatre, the agenda of the women's movement shaped the content of plays by prominent Group Theatres in West Bengal. It sought a definition and found several characteristics, as Anita Singh

puts it in her essay *Performing Resistance, Re-dressing the Canon: The Emergence of Indian Feminist Emergence of Indian Feminist Theatre* -

- "It was as much a political enterprise as a theatrical one. It was progressive in spirit and it questioned canons and conventions. It questioned Phallogocentrism and Phallogocentrism. It was an Avant Garde movement. It deconstructed patriarchal metaphysics. Like the postmodern with which it was closely associated some might say it was but one branch on the postmodern tree.
- Production, script and dramaturgy in which art was inseparable from the condition of women as women; performances (written and acted) that deconstructed sexual differences and thus undermined patriarchal power.
- Scripting and production that showcased transformation as a structural and ideological replacement for recognition and conception of women characters in the subject position.
- A womanist play had dissident potential that would 'open up the negotiation of meaning to contradictions, circularity, multiple viewpoints.' [Keyssar, Helene; *'Introduction' in Feminist Theatre and Theory: Contemporary Critical Essays*; Helene Keyssar (ed); Macmillan; London; 1996).
- It challenged the notion of representation/focused on the politics of representation and exposed how meanings are socially produced and historically conditioned." [Singh, Anita; *Performing Resistance, Re-dressing the Canon: The Emergence of Indian Feminist Emergence of Indian Feminist Theatre*; IIS University Journal of Arts; Vol.3(1); Jaipur; 2014]

There has been consistent efforts on the part of leading women directors, actors, playwrights to form productions and scripts that was recognized by realization of women as women, plays that mediated in the imaginary space as actual persons using factual experiences, this renovated the theatre stage into a liminal space for learning. The awareness acquired became the building blocks for action in real socio-political life to organize and investigate the elements of struggle against domination, and rehearses more egalitarian relations.

For women scriptwriters, developing of scripts for theatre has been, in many ways, to remonstrate against the institution of power that has been highly derogatory to women's claims so far and also against all conformist and conservative thinking. In this effort, they have also spot the fact that since long back classical myths, legends, parables, allegories incessantly resurface in discrete and diverse forms determining the discourse and dissertation of literature in a extremely idiosyncratic way to be recognized and exploited. To countenance myth as a woman playwright is to repeat and review one's own conquer and colonization through the substances his/her culture respects as powerful and primary. But to challenge and confront the myth is to act as protagonist. Our theatre practices, since earliest spells resolute on a single protagonist. In the realm of Group Theatre productions from 1990s onward, plays written by women challenge the traditional Indian artistry in which a single central character stick to a linear scheme by converging on an ensemble, thus staging the feminist conviction that the cluster is more vital than the discrete individual. Whereas the Indian classical dramatic constructions relied on concealed authors, the offshoots of feminist theatre in Bengal often fetches in women's narratives in an autobiographical fashion.

While more women artists started operating as directors in Group Theatres during these period compared to published playwrights, the record is still fairly limited. And though these women directors had a unique take and a exclusive affiliation to the term "feminism," there is certain common traits of their political and aesthetic choices. Along a few noteworthy exceptions, these women purposely refuse to be

labeled as feminists. Captivatingly, women who regard their most important role is political or academic rather than aesthetic, feel no hesitation to be designated as feminists, yet these women directors of Group Theatre producing new-age Bengali theatres on women's issues is criticized for “characters [that] don't come together . . . narrative [that] does not converge . . . no closure” [Subramanyam, Laxmi; *Muffled Voices: Women in Modern Indian Theatre*; Lakshmi Subramanyam (ed); Shakti Books; New Delhi; 2002]

There are, however, a many female directors who stubbornly contradict to agree that any rank of conscious gendered elucidation is exhibited in their creative ventures. Usha Ganguli, for example, opines that “in directing there is no question of male or female” [*Colloquium Two : Women in Group Theatre*” in *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*; 27-28 December; 2000]. By and large, perhaps the women who holds definite claims that their femininity does not impinge on their work, are also anxious about being hard-pressed to the precincts by the tag of 'woman' director. As Usha emphasizes, “Male directors were never differentiated by gender, they were just directors” [Katyay, Anjum; *A Coming Together ; An Affirmation ; A Sharing - Kulavai : A Report*; *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*; 9 April, 1996]. Sohag Sen, however, has a somewhat separate standpoint, considering that in the task of directing, she gesticulates off the boundaries of gender to cope up the work with both men and women. She contend that “when you direct, you have to really enter into the male psyche while working with a male actor. And you can only really enter into it by understanding his maleness” [Chowdhry, Neelam Mansingh; *Unpeeling the Layers within Yourself : A Dialogue with Sohag Sen*; *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*; 17 March, 1998].

For these women directors, sexual categories becomes elastic when it becomes a constraint on their faculty to accomplish what they wish to achieve. More willingly, then, viewing this as complete rebuff of their distinctiveness as female directors, one can see this expression as audacious undertakings of women who repudiate to allow gender typecast or textual hegemony to confine their role they assume and

performance they seek to expose. These women directors have earned accomplishments in a largely male occupied enterprise through cautious, meticulous and deliberate resolutions about when to pledge to prevailing cultural discernments of gender model and when to challenge them. They launch spaces of teamwork where other men and women can add a bit to the final performative content, and they highlight irregular sequence of events in the content that echo their own encounters of “disjointed space in which they have to negotiate their roles on multiple levels” [Jain, Kirti; *Different Concerns, Striking Similarities*; Theatre India; 3 May 2001].

The dramaturge and director endow with the composition and the broad-spectrum prospects for the character an actress performs, yet, to a great extent, the actress of her own resolves the details and essentials of the embodiment of that role. Conceivably, then, the task of the woman as actress is almost equivalent with her experiences from her daily life. In both spaces she is inhibited by ascendant compositional forms, but she is competent to locate medium in creation of her personal preferences about the particulars. As a matter of fact, a lot of actresses perceive added creative possibilities in performing than in developing scripts as authors or directing. As Indrani Maitra, an actress from Rangrup, a leading Group Theatre under the direction of Seema Mukhopadhyay, remarks, “The director’s creativity ends when the production of the play is complete. But an actress rediscovers her identity anew every day. She can act in a new guise every day. Which is why I have never felt that I wanted to be a director” [*Colloquium Two : Women in Group Theatre*” in Seagull Theatre Quarterly; 27-28 December; 2000]. Thus, for an actress acting in a role of a women piled with issues that a common women, anywhere in this country experiences, each day is an opportunity to her to alternate preferences and re-present the characters afresh to newer population of audience. Another actress, Suneepa Dutta, from Rangakarmee that performs under the direction of Usha Ganguly, underlines that the actress only has the scope and advantage of interrelate directly with her addressees and viewers, which the director and playwright is deprived of, by means of which an actress can mould the audience

to retort emotionally. [*In Her Own Words: Actresses Speak*"; Seagull Theatre Quarterly; 9 April, 1996]

In fact, since the early years of 1990s, there was a steady flow of actresses in Group Theatres throughout the state who were graduating in higher studies or seeking formal education in dramatics in universities, in search of their individual identity and liberty to speak free about their love and languish through theatre. This self-conscious generation of women activists retained their professional approach while getting associated with this Group Theatres. Although, they were not dependent on such earnings, they considered their association with the theatre as spending quality time. They were not much ideologically trained to expose themselves as feminist, nor they were willing to befit to any party-politics as such. Majority of these youngsters took acting as a career and least social commitment, yet their joining can't be limited a cultural extracurricular activity towards perfecting the important mechanism for developing communication, self-reliant thinking and qualities like accountability and self-assurance.

Usha Ganguli is one of leading figures of Group Theatre movement who has sincerely taken up and celebrated the spirit of feminine alternatives to life and art through her direction and adaption, although she discards the stamp of 'feminist' that could possibly turn up with her selection of female-centric themes and methods of storytelling. She strongly have faith in "the liberation of women and their freedom, and . . . trying . . . [her] best as a person, as a teacher and as a theatre worker to work towards that," but she emphatically rebuffs any recognition with feminism [Katyal, Anjum; *Rudali: From Fiction to Performance*; Seagull Books; Calcutta; 1997]. Usha renounces feminism because to certain degree she does "not want to deny the role of men. I believe that it is by working with both the masculine and the feminine that we will, at a point, reach harmony" [*Colloquium Two : Women in Group Theatre*" in Seagull Theatre Quarterly; 27-28 December; 2000]. For her, any over-conscious affiliation to feminism may risks in isolate or estrange men.

"The fact that this female protagonist figures out how to support herself in a world in which the odds are stacked against her speaks to Ganguli's respect for independent, wily, strong women. While she may not be a feminist, her commitment to telling women's stories demonstrates that a rejection of feminism does not result in a rejection of women's issues. Rather, it allows her to construct her own relationship to gender and the discourses surrounding gender in a modern Indian context." [Lieder, K. Frances; *Not-Feminism: A Discourse on the Politics of a Term in Modern Indian Theatre*; Asian Theatre Journal; Volume 32, Number 2, Fall 2005]

5.3. ENCOUNTERS WITH SOME WOMAN DIRECTORS OF GROUP THEATRE AND THEIR CREATIVE JOURNEY.

A patriarchal sphere of influence few years back, Group Theatre is receptive in contemporary era. Till some years ago, women were just actors in the group theatres with some exceptional few to take up organizational truncheon. But things have changed since then as women are increasingly taking the centre stage. At least two generations of enthusiastic women directors has appeared in West Bengal during the Left Front Rule to aesthetically handle political themes with flamboyance and demystifying classics with confidence. Their approaches and spectacular contributions marks the beginning of a new age in Bengali theatre by the women, of the women and for the women. This is an bright and optimistic appraisal of the condition of the Group Theatre scene in West Bengal, to which directors like Usha Ganguli, Jayati Bose, Seema Mukhopadhyay, Sohag Sen, Ishita Mukhopadhyay, Abanti Chakraborty, Trina Nileena Banerjee, Arpita Ghosh, Adrija Dasgupta, Shuktara Lal and many others, has been making remarkable record for more than the last quarter of a century.

5.3.1. USHA GANGULI

Usha Ganguli is an eminent figure in theatre clique in India. She has been central persona the Group Theatre named Rangakarmee, formed in 1976, which generally

performs in Hindi. Usha was born in Jodhpur and moved to Kolkata in the 1950s. A lover of dance as trained in Bharat Natyam, Usha joined the Sangit Kalamandir Theatre Group while pursuing her profession as a teacher of Hindi Language and Literature at Bhawanipore Education Society College. Dissatisfied with the amateurish and slapdash working of the group, she ultimately decided to found Rangakarmee. As a total performer to dance, acts and direct, she started directing in the 1980s and soon her vigorous grandeur and regimented ensemble work with young, sizeable casts spearheads Hindi theatre in Kolkata, enticing Hindi-speaking and Hindi-knowing audiences in Bengal.

Rangakarmee's landmark productions under her direction include *Mahabhoj* in 1984 based on Mannu Bhandari novel, Ratnakar Matkari's *Lokkatha* in 1987, *Holi* by playwright Mahesh Elkunchwar in 1989, *Rudali*, her own sensationalize version of a story by Mahashweta Devi in 1992, *Himmat Mai*, an adaptation of Brecht's "Mother Courage" in 1998 and especially *Court Marital* written by playwright Swadesh Deepak in 1991. *Beti Aayee* written by Jyoti Mahapeshkar in 1996. She has written a play *Kashinama* (2003), based on a story from the Kashinath Singh's classic work "Kashi Ka Assi" and an original play *Khoj* in 1994. Her solo performance in her own original play *Antatyaatra* in 2002 was very well received, and has elicited wide debate.

The themes Usha often venture to highlight is about social unfairness and mistreatments with the defenceless. Within these broader spectrum, gender inequality finds theatrical expressions through her works for which she has been honoured with innumerable awards including the Safdar Hashmi Puraskar from Uttar Pradesh Sangeet Natak Academy in 1999 and the national Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1998. Usha Ganguli is profoundly apprehensive about the manipulation and abuse of women and many of the dramas she has directed, produced and performed stands to this commitment.

Not negligible among the accomplishments of Usha Ganguli is her faculty to translates across the Indian languages and showcase those productions in every corner of the country. This is a momentous development in the country today, an acknowledgment and commemoration of the multilingual temperament of Indian society. Aparna Dharwadkar strappingly asserts her observations in this regard "Multilingualism and circulation in their post-independence forms have had a pioneering effect on dramatic authorship, theatre theory, and the textual life of drama. Playwrights who conceive of themselves as literary authors write with the anticipation that the original text of a play will soon enter the multilingual economy of translation, performance, and publication. [...] All these playwrights construct authorship and authority as activities that must extend across languages to sustain a national theatre movement in a multilingual society. [...] Thus, for both authors and audiences, the total effect of active multilingualism and circulation is to create at least four distinct levels for the dissemination and reception of contemporary Indian plays – the local, the regional, the national, and the international" [Dharwadkar, Aparna; *Women, Authorship, and Contemporary Indian Theatre*; Nukkar Vol. 1, no. 35-36; 2007].

5.3.2. JAYATI BOSE

Jayati Bose is a reputed drama actor and has remained active on stage from the mid 1970s. As director, Jayati Bose directed a number of plays such as *Protibimbo* in 1985, *Baki Itihas* in 1987, *Robot Kupokat* in 1996, *Jhakkas* in 1991, *Bhagabati Gai* in 1989, *Amio Superman* in 1995 and, of course, *Care Kori Naa* in 1993, which is undoubtedly her most successful work. Her abiding contribution has to be the introduction of Grips' theatre in Bengali. Her group, Sutrapat, always stayed on very freely ordered. May be there is hierarchy in the group, but certainly there was no patriarchy.

As Jayati was admitted to school at Shantiniketan at the age of 10, she had great opportunities to come across several forms of performing art theatre being the most of it. In 1974 she for the first time encountered the Group Theatres in Kolkata. She

felt the activities within and around theatre, although a sincere affair, was also ensuing abundant delight. She also retrieved into the large, broad external world (normally the domain of men) by means of theatre. Though she never ideologically pledge to communism or any such Left political ideals, Jayati become skilled at the art of aphorism through theatre. In Theatre Jayati enjoyed the scope of discovering and rejoice her quite unique individuality and sagacity of self-hood. She accents the reality behind her expulsion from Theatre Workshop under the direction of veteran theatre director Ashok Mukhopadhyay and how at that point she planned to frame Sutrapat, her own group as at this one peak of moment her life and theatre seemed to to her to have merge as one, and she had to take up a directorial role both in her theatre and her personal life.

As director, Jayati emphasizes that an actor must pay attention to nous of timing to produce momentous progression in the act, as she considers theatre as a cooperative rhythmic enterprise of interactions between the director, the actor and the people working in backstage. She combines theatre and life to expose that both has to be looked at in their respective totality. Thus when the theatre speaks about a woman's misery and pain or joy and success it should reflect as an amalgamation of many social-cultural-economic-political-religious and so like elements. A director delving in any content that speaks of women should not be therefore trapped within the limits of feminist framework, rather should strive to be holistic in approach. Any limited directorial vision is bound to wrongly portray on stage a content which is holds enormous possibilities.

With hindsight at the 70's, Jayati Bose talks about the weight given to content of a theatrical production which was an indicator of Leftist ideological impressions on the contemporary theatre and of course, the absolute weight of the director in the making of the theatre. This had created a sense of dissatisfaction with the traditions of Group Theatre movement as an artist. Only during that period she encountered Grip's Theatre at a workshop in Pune; it was the pioneering theatre movement worldwide to socio-critically contend with the lives and living circumstances of

broods and tender age people and to look at the paradox of modern life through their eyes and incorporate this in unique comical and musical plays. She immediately decided to take up the methodology and to apply when she read the script of *Care Kori Na* (1993). It was altogether a path breaking initiative in Bengali theatre to look at the complex city life of Calcutta through the eyes of a young girl. The actors were, however, adult enough to execute the task of acting like a tendering innocent boys and girls. The play's spectacular success can be attributed to the fact that it captured the spirit of the times.

Though Jayati admits that certain feminine perception and consciousness of personal life might be reflected in the works of a woman director, she contemplates it rather restrictive, being branded as a woman director. She does not think it essential for a woman director to continuously engage in categorically women's questions, yet she bewails the fact that in Bengali theatre she has rarely perceived a serious exercise and performance of a obvious female angle at work.

5.3.3. SOHAG SEN

Sohag Sen's involvement with theater and associated forms spans a length of approximately four decades. In actual fact, she is the second senior woman director after Tripti Mitra in the history of Group Theatre in West Bengal. As a thespian, she underwent her vocation following the supervision of the legendary mentor, Utpal Dutta, in the year 1969. Since then she has sustained to mesmerize the audience with vast range of characters, many of whom she played in dramas of her own direction. She has to her directorial acclaim plays by dramaturges as diverse as Mahesh Elkunchwar, Nirmal Verma, Satish Alekar and Botho Strauss. She started her career as a director in 1978 and had formed her own Group Theatre called Ensemble in 1983. Ensemble has produced several highly praised and applauded plays to its credit, including *Party* in 1979 , *Uttarpurush* in 1983 and *Mahanirvan* in 1986. Ensemble also maintains the unparalleled repute of launching prominent

playwrights from Indian over and above European theatre to the theatre stages in West Bengali for the first time.

Sohag has always emphatic on the method of theatre workshop as primary to the orderliness of acting hunt in the group, and therefore she prepared an elaborate design of workshop from the purpose of assisting an actor's input to the drama. The course includes comprehensive conversation on the text, subtext, characters and stimulus, thus making the productions a cooperative endeavor, based on the resolution between the director and the actor, which attested the workshop as crucial in imparting fundamental training to the actors as well. The method evolved in the course of time to have produced multiple 'Workshop Productions' under her direction like *Asahay* in 1989, *Natakiya* in 1992, *Sirir Niche* in 1995 and *Rog* in 1999 – again a pioneering step in the history of Group Theatre in West Bengal.

Her offerings to theatre has been acknowledged and acclaimed by many honour, rewards and accolades, including the Paschim Banga Natya Akademi Award for Theatrical Excellence and the Lebedov Award. Sohag Sen is a visiting faculty at the Rabindra Bharati University and the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute and she is also the Head of the Department of the Direction Course in Kolkata Film and Television Institute.

5.3.4. SEEMA MUKHOPADHYAY

Another versatile director of Group Theatre, Sima Mukhopadhyay completed her Master's degree in Drama (Acting) from Rabindra Bharati University, Jorasanko, to have earned Gold medal from the university and remained one of the founding member of Rang-Roop, where she directs dramatic productions since 1993. Earlier, she remained associated and has acted with many leading Theatre Groups of Kolkata, like Sanglaap Kolkata, Chetana, Gandhar, Anya Theatre, Pancham Vaidic, Pashchim Banga Natya Academy and Rang-Roop.

Sima holds an illustrious career as dramaturge to have composed twelve full length dramas, namely *Andhakarer Rang* in 1985, based on a short story by Subodh Ghosh, *Bikalpa* in 1989, *Bhanga Boned* in 1992, *Je Jan Aachhey Majhkhane* in 1995, *Panu Shanti Cheyechhilo* in 1998 based on a short story by Rama Nath Roy, *Aaborto* in 1999, *Shunyapat* in 2000, *He Mor Debota* in 2004 based on the short story of Debarshee Saroghi, *Mukhosh Nritya* in 2006 based on a short story by Bhagirath Misra, etc. She also has written number of one-act plays for children like *Sukhi Rajputtur* 2001 after a short story by Oscar Wilde, *Bholanather Darbar* in 2001, *Bhasmasur* in 2001, *Emontao Hoy* in 2002, *Kuber-er Bhojsabha* in 2002, *Budhahir Kawl* in 2002 etc. Besides she writes for All India Radio and Doordarshan regularly.

Smt Sima Mukhopadhyay has directed several full length dramas while working with Rang-Roop which includes *Boli* in 1994 a play written by Tripti Mitra, *Je Jan Aachhey Majhkhane* in 1995, *Aalor Phulky* in 1997 (in joint direction with Krishna Kishore Mukherjee), *Aaborto* in 1999, *Shunyapat* in 2001, *Sesh Raksha* in 2005, a noted play by Rabindranath Tagore, *He Mor Debota* in 2006, *Mukhosh Nritya* in 2006, *Byaram Biram* in 2007. Sima has truly cultivated the spirit of women in local sense of the term, and did not subscribe much beyond ethnic flavour Bengal at the core of her creations. She also has directed few one-act dramas, namely *Sukhi Rajputtur* in 2001, *Bholanather Darbar* in 2001, *Bhasmasur* in 2001, *Emontao Hoy*, *Kuber-er Bhojsabha*, and *Budhahir Kawl* all in 2002.

As recognitions to her expanded creative journey Sima Mukhopadhyay has received Ritwik Ghatak Smriti Puraskar as the best actress for her performance in *Clown* in 1985. She was awarded as the best actress by Pashchim Banga Natya Academy, for her performance in *Bikalpa* and *Balidan* in 1992. She also own the prestigious Dishari Puraskar given by the Journalist Association of Bengal for *Panu Santi Cheyechhilo* in 2000 as the best playwright. Smt. Sima Mukhopadhyay received Kalakar Award as the best director, in 2000-2001 for *Aaborto*.

5.3.5. ISHITA MUKHOPADHYAY

Vigorously involved in Group Theatre activities for more than three decades, Ishita Mukhopadhyay has paved her situate as one of the leading theatre director of her times. Her journey in theatre started since she was an undergraduate student at Jadavpur University. She was at once pulled towards theatre and directed to produce her first play when she was a college-going young lady. As a matured director, she prepares her theatre as a woman to endure upon her creation a responsiveness and susceptibility that comes from her experience of life as a woman. She holds very well-rounded observations about Group Theatre, the sustainable economy of theatre and the dare to reflect political views in theatre, however she also reacts as she observes that it is not always feasible to be overt or direct and anterior with political agenda, if women's issues are considered as one, for a host of reasons. During three decades of her activism in Group Theatre, Ishita has directed a horde of plays of which *Kamalkamini* in 1978, *Ghar* in 1984, *Jaan-E-Kolkatta* in 1999, *Khela Bhangar Khela* in 2000, *Kallu Mama* in 2004 , *Ora Tinjon* in 2005 and *Agnijatak* in 2007 are worthy of special mention.

Her directorial debut was an acclimatization of *The Room* by Jean Paul Sartre. She always preferred to be a playwright and director of drama and never a thespian. Her group Ushnik was founded in 1984 and performed the Sartre adaptation designated as *Ghar* in the same year. She welcomes the plan of workshop-based theatres provided the script demands so. Ishita finds herself as progressively more attracted to the core issue of the inherent philosophy of every theatre. She is deliberate as she conveys a conspicuous feminine point of view in her creations while she endeavours to rejoice her womanhood through her theatre. She is vibrant to opine about how substance, before appearance, is the central imperative to her and also about her preferences to craft in a manner where language become the instrument of understanding the mental attitude of the characters.

Ishita observes that there is growing tendency in Group Theatre activism now a days to produce and promote star thespians motivated and obsessed by the tenets of market economy and she finds nothing incorrect in theatre being considered as an occupation to make money. However, she strongly criticizes any attempt on the part of the theatre to allure popular taste by being dishonest in general or distorting any of the elements of theatre. Ishita blazes heavily on the happenings and observable facts of government grants being tainted and spoiled in certain activities of Group Theatre.

5.3.6. ABANTI CHAKRABORTY

Of the busiest female directors of Group Theatre Abanti Chakraborty has a special genre to produce classics on stage with their contemporary reflections. She was initiated into theatre in her early teens and since then if Shakespeare was an initial favourite, Sophocles became an obsession later. Abanti never thought of considering theatre as a career until she met noted Marathi director and a faculty member in Hyderabad Central University, Bhaskar Shivalkar, who familiarize her with the aesthetics of stage and drama. She was so overwhelmingly encouraged and gravitated towards theatre that within two years she was like a natural choice as the female lead in Anant Kulkarni's *Aarop*. Returning to Kolkata, she acted in productions like Arghya's *Simar*. But she always intended to cherish her instinct for direction. So, she made her debut in directorial with a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 2003 where the performers were the hearing-impaired children from a special school of Hyderabad. *Tatri*, her second directorial drama was the produced in the following year.

At present she is directing classic European and American dramas with a Group Theatre named Aarshi. Her construals of Euripides's *Medea* in 2005, Ibsen's *Doll's House* in 2006 and O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* in 2007 have been highly appreciated. She is now designing to present Iliad by Homer on stage in eight hours in the line of Peter Brook's Mahabharata.

5.3.7. TRINA NILEENA BANERJEE

Trina Nileena Banerjee's, parents Salil and Arundhati Bandyopadhyay were busy actors on stage and was introduced to the stage of modern Bengali theatre at an age of twelve when her father told her to replace an actor in a production named *Khelaghar* produced by the Group Theatre called Theatron. While studying in Loreto College she made her first appearance as a director with Anton Chekov's play *Death of A Clerck*. In 2003, still as a student of Jadavpur University, she directed Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* under the banner of a group formed by the students of the university named Theatrician. It was quite well-received. Afterward Trina went to Oxford for two years to pursue her further studies. As she returned home, she was eager to direct preferred scenes from two of Tennessee Williams plays, *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 2006. Having a sound grip in the English language and literature, Trina was enthusiastic to connect forth an extensive audience. Thus she designed and directed *Mitrapuran*, a Vijay Tendulkar play translated by her father for Theatron in 2006. Her maiden appearance in the film Nisshabd directed by Jahar Kanungo contained her with best Actor's Award (Female) in the 7th Osian Film Festival. Yet she has found her best self in theatre to produce Rabindranath Tagore's ever significant *Raktakarabi* in 2007.

5.3.8. ARPITA GHOSH

In her college days, Arpita Ghosh, as a student of Scottish Church in the mid-1980s was enthralled by the theatrical dexterity of Smt. Saoli Mitra in the renowned *Nathabati Anathabat*, a Pancham Vaidic production. Arpita appropriated theatre earnestly in 1998 while joining a Group Theatre named Fourth Wall. In 2000 she got the major break to join Charyashram, a yearlong theatre training course administered by Pancham Vaidic. Within few years next, she was performing, scripting and directing Pancham Vaidic productions with Saoli Mitra as her mentor.

In 2003, Arpita's directorial debut was with two dramatic productions—a dramatised version of Sukumar Ray's absurd story *Ha-Ja-Ba-Ra-La* and the one-act *Antargata Agun*. In the next year, she performed in the lead female role of *Rajnoitik Hatya*, a paraphrase of Jean Paul Sartre's *Crime Passionnel* under the direction of Saoli Mitra. The guide and the scholar performed jointly in *Chandali* a production based on Rabindranath Tagore's literature in 2005. Yet it was *Poshu Khamar* in 2006, an adaptation of George Orwell's famous anti-totalitarian novel named *Animal Farm*, that proved Arpita as a leading director of recent trends of Bengali theatre. The production gathered quite a controversy in the background of the Left Front government's policy for procurement of agricultural lands for industry in Singur and Nandigram. In 2007 she has translated and dramatised Ronald Segal's much discussed to direct *Tokolosh*.

5.3.9. ADRIJA DASGUPTA

Adrija Dasgupta found the space to develop her dramatic potential at the Indian People's Theatre Association, Kolkata Branch since 1986. She made her appearance on stage in a role of the wife of scientist Otto Hann in a production called *Biswasghatak* that year. Thus started, her journey in the arena of theatre flourished further as she enrolled in the Drama department of Rabindra Bharati University in 1992. She got her major break through Bibhas Chakraborty's *Madhab Malanchi Kainya* in 1988. Besides the regular academic course work, she participated in number of suburban theatre productions before seeking admission in National School of Drama in 1995. After graduating from NSD she developed keen interest in direction and started working with several Group Theatres in and around Kolkata.

Thus Adrija got associated with groups like Sudrak and Ebang Ekalabya. She has conducted many theatre workshops for youngsters. She formed her own group Uhini in 2003 and produced her first directorial initiative in *Bijalibalar Mukti - Ekti Manabik Khonj*, based on Moti Nandy's novel, staged in 2004. In the following years Adrija directed *Dure Baje* in 2005 and *Tumi Daak Diyechho Kon Sakale* in 2007.

Tumi Daak Diyechho Kon Sakale was based on the real life of Smt. Keya Chakraborty and her fascinating journey in theatre who remained one of the foremost actresses of Group Theatre in the 1960s and 70s. In most of her productions Adrija has unleashed her feminist streak in strongest capacity.

5.3.10. SHUKTARA LAL

Theatre happened for Shuktara Lal through her father, drama critic Ananda Lal. While studying in Jadavpur University, she performed in all the theatrical productions her father used to produce. She also acted in the Theatrician group in the production of Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* in 2003. Seeing her friend Trina Nileena Banerjee fitting into the director's role, she also gave a honest thought to direction. Meticulous study materials of world drama was readily available at her father's courtesy. After going through most of the available literatures she felt it suitable to direct Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* in 2004. She realized that there is scanty good scripts in Hindi literature to be produced on stage. Therefore, for her subsequent production with Theatrician in 2005, Shuktara opted Asif Currimbhoy's *Goa*. Within months after premiering *Goa*, she went to New York to engage in her Masters in Performance Studies. As she returned in 2007, she started working with Sanved, a social N.G.O, to act in theatre as a mechanism for psychotherapy and empowerment of battered and harmed women. She has also pursued research on the politics of Manipur while on the production front, Shuktara has staged a bi-lingual production of Tagore's *Arupratan*. She dreams to bridge the blinkered segregations parting the audience of Bengali, English and Hindi theatre in West Bengal.

This is, in no sense, a complete or comprehensive discourse about the women theatre makers in West Bengal, neither I claim that the study reflects the proper width as it does not mention even a few of the women directors, playwrights or actors in districts beyond the mega-city district. Yet I feel this should be done as a theme of an independent study to enquire into the field of creative endeavor of the women directors of Group Theatre in West Bengal. My study, although has a different focal

area, has highlighted the contributions of women theatre makers to note at least two facts, first being the recent growing trend of more and more independent, liberal, educated, articulated generation of women activists to have taken their deserved position within the frameworks of Group Theatre movement in West Bengal gradually substituting typically orthodox hierarchy of male inside the groups and are speaking up fluently what they wish to express in course of their creations; secondly, although their contributions have, in cumulative aspect, brought under the spotlights of proscenium the experience of womanhood as they bear by building theatres on women's issue, they do not agree much to confine their identity as feminist theatre activists and designate such a card rather out and out limiting.

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