

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction.

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### 1.1. BACKGROUND AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

A debate has been raging over the last couple of decades about the sensitivity of the cultural activism towards the struggles and movements of and for the woman in our country. A number of scholars have expressed interest in analyzing the phenomena from a socio-political perspectives. As a matter of fact, feminism had a late arrival in this country, and moreover, had a very limited scope in the sphere of performing arts. It is a moot point, however, if ever, there was a chance to academically built any framework of Indian version of feminism. In the realm of performing arts, a serious question on the same note remain pertinent, whether the making of the female character on stage from the age-old literary works of Kalidasa to a more technologically advanced proscenium production playwrights of the date, dare to delimit the chalk-circles drawn by the patriarchy or not. The debate on 'gender and media relationship' may be, thus, revised encompassing such fundamental questions besides focusing upon the approaches of the frontrunners of the woman's movements in our country in relation to such debate.

### 1.2. OF FEMINIST CRITICAL THEORY AND THEATRE

Centrally, Performance Studies set-out to understand the study of Drama as the study of theatre in its historical, theoretical and practical contexts. Each of these three areas has undergone conceptual and methodological shifts in the move towards a 'new' theorized field of Performance Studies under the broad discipline of Social Science. The importance of Feminist approach in recent thinking about theatre history, theory and practice is considerable. The current study sets out to

demonstrate its importance through a survey of the feminist projects in contemporary Bengali theatre, in one hand and the course of interaction between such significant projects and a dominant political ideological campaign through theatre as a tradition of cultural practices in West Bengal, on the other.

Writing on the growth of Performance Studies in the American context, feminist theatre academic Sue-Ellen Case comments, "as the study of theatre within theatre departments developed, it was dominated by the history of theatre, rather than its criticism" [Sue-Ellen Case (ed.); **Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre**; The Johns Hopkins University Press; London; 1990]. This was a consequence of the way in which performance studies sought to re-locate the study of plays within their historic-theatrical context. Theatre, studied as dramatic literature in English departments, has been divorced from the context of its production. Performance studies, however, began to examine the history of playing spaces, performance conditions, audience compositions, and the various artistic, social and political functions assigned to theatre at different times. In this context, play-texts, themselves, once 'read' as opposed to dramatic texts, were seen to contain important information about aspects of their contemporary staging.

By 1985, the year of the first British Academic Women's Theatre Conference held at Warwick University, a 'feminist thinking' of theatre history was shown to be well underway. Different periods of theatre history from the Renaissance to the Nineteenth Century were re-examined by feminist approaches. The methodologies used to frame the historical material were a mixture of 'old' and 'new'. On the traditional side these included the 'images of women in male-authored drama approach' derived from feminist literary studies; and the empirical research of under/non-documented work by women in theatre. The conference also showed a feminist intervention in more recent theoretical positions used to re-frame theatre-history: a feminist appropriation of 'semiotics' (Semiotics offered an understanding of the theatrical text as a sign-system, and, moreover, provided a 'language' for the study of plays in performance :: *Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* by **Aston Elaine**)

critiqued the images of women in Nineteenth Century theatre; feminist-cultural-materialist analysis alienated the representation of women (by men) on the Renaissance stage.

When Manchester University hosted a second major feminist theatre history conference in 1989, focusing specially on the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century British stages, it demonstrated that there was now an established and growing body of feminist historic-revisionist activity in the field of Performance Studies. The 'new direction' in theatre history was exposing the history of male domination on the stage and recovering women's performance which, like so much of women's culture, had been 'hidden' and silenced by a body of conservative, male criticism.

In addition to semiotics, there were several other spheres of critical theory in the 1980s which provided important frameworks and methodologies for the study of plays and performance. The field of theatre connected with disciplines such as Politics, Anthropology, Sociology and Psychoanalysis. It was re-examined within the contexts of post-structuralism, post-modernism and deconstruction; was cross-examined by the new-historians, Marxist scholars, cultural materialist, and by the theory and practice of feminism(s).

As performance studies was a late developer and the impact of feminism came much later than in other studies, feminist critical theory in theatre began by 'borrowing' from feminist projects in related discipline. Feminist theatre scholarship was subsequently able to draw on this work to develop a conceptual and methodological framework for critiquing how women are 'imaged' in dramatic productions. Unlike its literary 'sister', however, the feminist study of theatre had not only to 'resist' or re-read the written text, but also needed to find ways of 'reading' the performance context. Theatre studies looked to film and media studies where feminist scholarship focused on the construction of women as sign: an approach in which feminism,

psychoanalysis, and semiotics was and is being used to understand how women are represented in cinematic texts as other cultural contexts.

Feminist theorization of stage practice has been critical of those realist traditions of performance which work in tandem with dominant and oppressive representations of gender, and 'glorify the phallus' centre stage. Feminism looked to a theatrical practice rooted in a desire for political change.

Now, why Bengali Theatre? It goes without saying that Bengal had been among the Indian provinces that advanced the most in education and culture during the colonial rule. Thus Bengal was the first to be illuminated by the lights of Indian Renaissance. The lives and the living of the woman in Bengal had been under severe oppression under the medieval patriarchy and the Brahminism. It was then the vanguards of the Bengal Renaissance, armed with the light of new knowledge, called out for the movement for Religious and Social reforms. The newspapers and the theatre of that era played a progressive role, though with major limitations, to spread the message of such philanthropic movement to the common people. The dramatic productions like *Sadhabar Ekadoshi* (1866), *Vidhaba Vivah* (1872), and *Sati Ki Kalankini?* (1875) exposed the plight of the incarcerated woman. Playwrights like Dinabandhu Mitra, Madhusudan Dutta, Rabindranath Tagore, Girish Chandra Ghosh, Shishir Bhaduri, gave voice to the hitherto unheard experiences of the woman.

However, it is rather unfortunate to note that the woman had no right to act in those plays that denoted their stories in the Bengali theatre during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The few who actually got the break to appear on the stage were either prostitutes or dirt poor. Even the leading lights of Bengal Renaissance had been carrying a prejudiced thought to oppose women's liberty to perform on stages. It was at the dawn of the independence that the Leftist ideology in the form of people's theatre movement of I.P.T.A brought the educated women the opportunity to perform in theatres in the dramatic productions like *Nabanna* by Bijon Bhattacharya (1944), *Jwala* by Writtik

Ghatak (1951), *Dukhir Iman* by Tulsi Lahiri (1955), *Laboratory* by Benoy Ghosh (1956), *Louha Kapat* by Manmatha Roy (1958) etc. Bengali Theatres, by that time, had been more into the documentation of the local and national crisis than depicting the predicament of the women as individual. It seemed that the Bengali Theatres of that period led by the Marxist understanding of the events had taken it for granted that the root of all social inequality including the oppression of women was the basic exploitative nature of the economic system. As soon as Socialism is achieved, women problems like all other social disparities shall disappear.

The transition of Bengali Theatre from People's Theatre (I.P.T.A) to Neo Theaterism (led by some departed stalwarts of the I.P.T.A movement like Sombhu Mitra) to the contemporary Group Theater had been an influential shift in paradigm in the cultural history of Bengal after the partition. Amateur theatre in the form of Group Theatre in West Bengal became the mainstream of Bengali theatre almost at the same span of time that the Left Front regime was installed and consolidated in the state. To a greater extent majority of the Group Theatres plotted their dramatic productions as to give passive support to the 'friendly government' in the power. Some of these groups even strongly propagated the gospel of Leftist political views through electoral campaigns. As courtesy to such a stance by the Group Theatres they received great endowment from the Left Front Government. Almost each of the towns theatres were established under the state sponsorship, the government also set up Paschim Banga Natya Academy to encourage the theatrical activities throughout the province, frequent Theatre Festivals, Workshops, Exhibitions were organized under the government patronage and government grants were pouring in for theatre. However, critics point out the silent process of bringing the Bengali theatre into the fold of an establishment. And the Bengali theatre had shown no will to expose on stage the oppressive face of the 'state power' maintaining the orthodox Marxist class-view. Gradually the dramatic productions of the Group Theatres of Bengal turned its face towards exploring the fragmented "personal crisis" of the individuals. And this trend has opened up a new vista for the Feminism in respect of the Bengali theatre. From the city of Kolkata to the mofussils, the life and the crisis of

the woman became the concern of Bengali theatre. Char Adhyay (1951), Voma (1976), Putul Khela (1977), Nathbati Anathbat (1983), Maa (1985), Vama (1990), Rudali (1992), Jejon Achhe Majhkhane (1995), Beti Ayee (1996), Jara Brishtite Vijejhilo (1997), Sanu Roy Choudhury (1998), Himmat Mai (1998), Mukti(1999), Suprova (2000), Natir Katha (2003) -- woman as the victim of semi-feudal exploitation; woman subjected to the attack of global consumerism; women of the epics improvised in the reality of the date; woman towards iconisation -- since 1978 till date 'the woman' is being developed from all possible creative perspectives in the contemporary arena of mainstream Bengali Theatre.

The question is - can these creative efforts operate beyond the influence of the 'establishment'? Any serious study to understand the reflections, if not the biasness, of 'established Left' in the contemporary Bengali theatre that speaks about women may contribute to the socio-cultural history of the region.

The proposed study has taken an empirical investigation in the interior of the contemporary Bengali Theatre and has collected the possible anecdotes of the theatrical productions of the leading Group Theatres spanning across the districts of West Bengal, i.e period of the performance, directorial improvisation, thematic discourse of the script (if the production is a manuscript-play), interconnectivity of the play with the contemporary social background, suggestions and messages conveyed through the production and the major critiques on the play as available. Based on the gathered primary data, the study has tried to locate all possible traits of the Leftist political regime in the conceptualization of the 'gender issues' in the modern Bengali theatrical constructs. The study has also tried to reach at a conclusion that may facilitate future researches in enriching the pool of interdisciplinary studies in other aspects of cultural life in other parts of our country.

### 1.3 AREA OF ENQUIRY IN THE STUDY

It is noteworthy that the critical juncture of the triangular relationship between Gender, Media and Regime has fascinated scanty intellectual endeavour. Lack of significant focus on this space is basically due to the ignorance amongst the political researchers in considering theatre as a vibrant media of political socialization. There has been considerable amount of critical studies on the Indian mainstream cinemas, yet there were lack of concern to study modern Indian mainstream theatres as politically insightful perspective.

The cultural history of West Bengal reveals the note that for more than three decades the themes of the mainstream theatrical activities in the state has been predominantly pro-leftist in approach. A strong Leftist cultural tradition, like I.P.T.A movement, had set forth the backdrop of the genesis and augmentation of Group Theatre activities, which was further nurtured and patronised by the Left Front Government. Therefore, this mutually reciprocal relationship between the two major aspects of the present study has contributed to a unique politico-cultural symbiosis in West Bengal.

At the time that women and media debate began reviving, especially in the context of dramatic productions shown in various prosceniums of the country, the theatre media in West Bengal was witnessing some dramatic developments. With the installation of the Left-Front Government in the state, slow but steady efforts were made to institutionalize the ideologies of the Left-Front in education and mass-media like theatre. Number of theatre halls were developed, theatre groups were given Government assistance, an academy for the theatre groups of the state was established under the supervision of the Information and Cultural Department of the Left-Front Government to 'aid and assist' the theatrical efforts of the theatre groups of the state. As a linear consequence to all these, serious tuning-changing operation was gradually taking place in various stages. And a pro-Left bias was in vogue in the 'language' and 'message' of the mainstream theatrical productions of the Group

Theatres of West Bengal. While it was expected that in the midst of the contemporary wave of women's issues at the national and international level, the theatre media, as a symbiotic agent of the Left Front regime in West Bengal, shall respond by making their productions more gender-inclusive and gender-sensitive and harp on the relevance of the State's commitments towards women, the Group Theatres of West Bengal went on theorising women's issues as an integral part of the broader consequence of Capitalist exploitation. No doubt, such a reductionist approach was not welcomed by many of the contemporary feminist critiques of Bengali theatre, and the surfaced regimentation of the mainstream Group Theatres for the political career of the Left-Front Government in the state was being influenced by new challenges and pressures.

Meanwhile, the more interesting outcome of the developments over the last decade and a half has been the response of the native theatre-media to "Globalisation". Under the pressure of globalization and the competition from satellite television a majority of renowned Group Theatres of West Bengal moved swiftly from an 'ideological shows' to one dedicated and driven by advertisers and sponsors. This shift has been attributed to two factors. Given the fall of financial support from the government, the need to earn funds from advertisements and prevent the loss of viewership to competing channels has made such a shift inevitable and logical. Such is the bogey of commercial viability that hardly any crucial question was raised on women's issues. This in turn influences the representation of family structures in the dramatic productions of the Group Theatres. It is largely nuclear, with a sizeable proportion of men and women. The extended family is in fact few and far between. The overwhelming representation of certain segments of society in terms of age, class, lifestyle and preoccupations is a planned outcome of a market-strategy. Given this focus on the rich, assertive and enterprising entrepreneur, the business milieu provides much of the context in which some of the contemporary preoccupations with liberalization and opening up of the economy and its impact on civil society gets reflected and addressed. It is therefore not surprising that what is being projected is the highly assertive urban Bengali, a leader of sorts who is highly

individualistic and accountable to no one. Women figure as wives, lovers, professional colleagues, friends and even as enemies. Within this broader context the struggles continue to be stereotyped. Men have professional setbacks and personal disappointment in love to reckon with; women, on the other hand, have to face far more complex pressures ranging from disintegration of personal relationships, estrangement of children, to withstanding threats of sexual assault and molestation, blackmail etc. Again, such productions fail to uphold any serious question about State's commitment towards women. In short, what we found ourselves watching on the stage was an uneasy mix of a so-called social reality that the audience found credible and true either for upper class families living in big cities and a construct of the women that is highly problematic.

In such a scenario some pertinent survey of the dramatic productions of the Group Theatre requires greater attention to meet specific enquiries like, how these theatre troops look at the problems of women, what remains as their basis of selection of scripts for productions, whether any post-production review is made on the basis of the comments of women in the audience, what has been the influence of the leftist ideology and the market factors to locate any concern on the women etc.

#### **1.4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Having perceived the problem area of the study, the present research has intended to achieve certain objectives, as stated below -

- To analyze and reinterpret the theories selected in the study, to check their applicability in accordance to the regime-media-gender ecology in the state of West Bengal.
- To focus on the traits of ideological temperaments of Bengali theatre as a traditional media of socialization in the portrayal of 'Gendered' points during the rule of Left Front Government in West Bengal.

- To understand the attributes of the Gender-Media-Regime relationship as reflected in contemporary Bengali theatre in the age of Liberal Market Economy.
- To point at the emerging scope of an alternative theatre, free from the influence of market or ideology, to enlighten authentic and exclusive questions on Women's agenda.

## 1.5. REVIEW OF THE AVAILABLE LITERATURES

A fleeting go through the literatures available on the issue of politics of performance divulge that these literatures can broadly be categorized into four sets of distinctly different categories, as --

Firstly, literatures on the *understanding of the correlation of 'Politics' and the 'Performing Art'*; Cultural theory has taken a 'performative turn', shifting its focus from the textual nature of the world to how the social world is narrated, its subjects are subjected and its relations are ritually enacted. The rise of performativity in cultural theory has profound implications for the way we think about ethics and politics. Indeed, as it concerns all aspects of 'difference', it reshapes the ways we think about the continuities and interruptions of social life itself. Culture and Performance explores the development and direction of the notion of performativity. It interrogates the idea of subjectivity, the possibility of ethics and, beyond this, it explores new ways of thinking political imaginations and possibilities. It traces the implications of the concept, and assesses the critique that is emerging from a renewed interest in creativity. The literatures under this category come from both Marxist and Non-Marxist tradition in plenty of numbers. Notable of them are like

- Bell, Vikki; **Culture and Performance : The Challenge of Ethics, Politics and Feminist Theory**; Seagull Books; New Delhi; 2005.
- Benjamin, Walter; **Understanding Brecht**; New Left Books; London; 1977.

- Bentley, Eric; **Theory on the Modern Stage : An Introduction to Modern Theatre and Drama**; Penguin; Harmondsworth; 1992.
- Bharucha, Rustom; **Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture**; Routledge, London, 1998.
- Bradby, David; **Performance and Politics in Popular Drama: Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film and Television, 1800-1976**; Cambridge University Press; London; 2005.
- Chelmsford, Hanna; **Vladimir Mayakovsky : Plays, Articles, Essays**; Raduga Publishers; Moscow; 1987.
- **Collected Works of Maxim Gorky; Volume X**; Progress Publishers; Moscow; 1982.
- Craig, David (ed.); **Marxists on Literature : An Anthology**; Penguin; Harmondsworth; 1975.
- David, Brady, James, Louis and Sharratt, Bernarad (ed.); **Performance and Politics in Popular Drama**; Cambridge University Press; London; 2002.
- Finburgh, Clare, Lavery, Carl, and Shevtsova, Maria (ed.); **Performance and Politics**; Palgrave Macmillan; London; 2006.
- Forgacs, David and Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey; **Antonio Gramsci : Selection from Cultural Writings**; Lawrence and Wishart; London; 1985.
- Hollows, Joanne and Moseley, Rachel; **Feminism in Popular Culture** Oxford University Press; London; 2006.
- **Lenin on Tolstoy from Lenin's Collected Works; Volume IV**, Progress Publishers; Moscow; 1982.
- **Mao Zedong : Talks at the Yenan Forum**; Foreign Languages Press; Beijing; 1967.
- Piscator, Erwin; **The Political Theatre**; Eyre Methuen; London; 1980
- **Selected Works of Lu Xun; Volume III**; Foreign Languages Press; Beijing; 1985.

In the Second category, there are ample amount of publications *on the correspondence of performance and politics at the global level*. As a matter of fact, such exclusive

interdisciplinary studies are in vogue in other continents as a concern for political sociology. The literature under this category presents some ongoing struggles and tensions in feminist work as researchers and theorists carve niches, expand knowledge, and strive for legitimacy in the academy and, of course, a remarkable synthesis of past and present feminist communication work as well as its look toward the future. The examples throughout are vivid and compelling and the primary focus on the performance lens offers much to identity, cultural, and political communication and feminist studies. It is an excellent resource or springboard for future scholarship as well as a riveting and coherent analysis of scholarship that can challenge advanced students in feminist and communication studies courses. The publications under this category also present an able and insightful guide to the diverse and changing ways that feminist scholars in communication, linguistics, and cultural studies have theorized and researched gender communication as dominance, identity and difference, and performance. The innovative formats of these texts links theory to research methodologies illustrated by case studies of face-to-face and theatre-mediated communication. Bringing together some of the most important and groundbreaking theorists and performers of the late twentieth century, this category of reader juxtaposes writings on gender in performances in post-apartheid South Africa and post-Communist Russia, post-industrial USA with well known, and frequently cited publications by prominent feminist theorists such as Jill Dolan, Judith Butler, Teresa de Lauretis, and Laura Mulvey. Essential reading for feminists, theatre enthusiasts and theatre and art practitioners, these books constitute the most up-to-date resource for the exploration of gender and performance, worldwide. Citation of some of such works may be like

- Arrizon, Alicia; **Latina Performance: Traversing the Stage (Unnatural Acts: Theorizing the Performative)**; Beacon Press; London; 2000.
- Bradby, David, James, Louis and Sharratt, Bernard (ed.); **Performance and Politics in Popular Drama :Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, 1800-1976**; Cambridge University Press; 1998.
- Edmondson, Laura; **Performance and Politics in Tanzania: The Nation on Stage**; Indiana University Press; USA; July 2007.

- Fusco, Coco; **Corpus Delecti : Performance Art of the Americas**; Routledge Publications; Berlin; 1999.
- Larson, Catherine and Vargas, Margarita (ed); **Latin American Women Dramatists: Theater, Texts, and Theories**; Indiana University Press; USA; 1999.
- Munoz, Jose Esteban and Munoz, Rose Esteban ; **Disidentifications : Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics**; University of Minnesota Press; Minnesota; 1999.
- Richardson, Angelique and Willis, Chris; **The New Woman in Fiction and Fact**; Palgrave; Basingstoke; 1998.
- Schechner, Richard and Appel, Willa (ed); **By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual** by Cambridge University Press; London; 1990.
- Schechner, Richard; **Between Theater and Anthropology**; University of Pennsylvania Press; Pennsylvania; 1985.
- Taylor, Diana and Villegas, Juan (ed.); **Negotiating Performance: Gender, Sexuality, and Theatricality in Latin America**; Duke University Press; 1994.
- Troyano, Alina; **I, Carmelita Tropicana: Performing between Cultures**; Beacon Press; London; 2000.
- Turner, Victor; **From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play**; PAJ; New York; 1982.

The Third cluster of literatures are grouped as those scholastic writings that focuses on the context of a native Indian Theatre that has passed through many critical junctures of being the projection of political sociology of India on stage. After Independence, in 1947, in their efforts to create an 'Indian' theatre that was different from the Westernized, colonial theatre, Indian theatre practitioners began returning to their 'roots' in classical dance, religious ritual, martial arts, popular entertainment and aesthetic theory. The Theatre of Roots - as this movement was known - was the first conscious effort at creating a body of work for urban audiences combining modern European theatre with traditional Indian performance while maintaining its distinction from

both. By addressing the politics of aesthetics and by challenging the visual practices, performer/spectator relationships, dramaturgical structures and aesthetic goals of colonial performance, the movement offered a strategy for reassessing colonial ideology and culture and for articulating and defining a newly emerging 'India'. The third category of literatures presents in-depth analysis of this movement: its innovations, theories, goals, accomplishments, problems and legacies.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century many forms of theatre have been called 'popular', but in the twentieth century the term 'popular drama' has taken on definite political overtones, often indicating a repudiation of 'commercial theatre'. But does that mean that political theatre is or tries to be more attractive to more people than commercial theatre? Does it conversely mean that commercial theatre has no political effects? These are some pertinent questions that have been raised in various literatures assembled under this category. Contributions came from people with very different types of experience: from an ex-animal trainer to a lecturer in film studies; from playwrights, directors and actors to professional critics and academics. Each author focused on a particular problem of defining drama in performance, drawing together the conditions of performance, the types of audience and the political effects of the plays or films in question. The result was a series of fruitful connections and juxtapositions which shows the remarkable continuity of the problems raised in attempts to create a popular political drama in the Indian environment. Some influential writings in this are inclusive of followings.

- B. Mee, Erin; **Theatre of Roots : Redirecting the Modern Indian Stage**; Berg Publishers, New York, 1999.
- Barlingay, S.S.; **A Modern Introduction to Indian Aesthetic Theory**; Eastern Book Corporation; New Delhi, 2007.
- Dalmia, Vasudha; **Poetics, Plays and Performances : The Politics of Modern Indian Theatre**; Oxford University Press; USA; 2005.
- Deshpande, G. P.; **Political Plays**; Seagull Books; London; 1998.

- Dhananjayan, V.P.; **Beyond Performing Art and Culture : Politico-Socio Aspects**; B.R. Rhythms; New Delhi; 2007.
- Dhananjayan, V.P.; **Beyond Performing Art and Culture : Politico-Socio Aspects**; B.R. Rhythms, New Delhi, 2007.
- Lal, Ananda and Dasgupta, Chidananda (ed.); **Rasa : The Indian Performing Arts in the Last Twenty-five Years (Vol. II Theatre and Cinema)**; Rawat Publication ; New Delhi; 1995.
- Mukherjee, Tutun (ed.); **Staging Resistance Plays by Women in Translation**; Oxford University Press; New Delhi; 2005.
- Nandy, Ashis; **The Secret Politics of Our Desires - Innocence, Culpability and Indian Popular Cinema**; Oxford University Press; India; 2001.
- Paul, Rajinder (ed.); **Contemporary Indian Theatre**; Eastern Book Corporation; New Delhi, 2006.
- Reddy, K. Venkata and Dhawan, R.K. (ed.); **Flowering of Indian Drama : Growth and Development**; Prestige; New Delhi; 2004.
- Richmond, Farley P. (ed.); **Indian Theatre (Traditions of Performance)**; Seagull Books; Kolkata; 1993.
- Talwar, Urmila and Chakrabarty, Bandana (ed.); **Contemporary Indian Drama : Astride Two Traditions**; Rawat Publication ; New Delhi; 2005.
- Uberoi, Patricia; **Freedom and Destiny - Gender, Family, and Popular Culture in India**; Oxford University Press; India; 2006.

The fourth category of literatures explores *how Bengali theatre and the upsurges of various political movements inform and appropriate each other during the post-independence era*. As Bengal was the centre of the interaction, negotiation and conflict between the native and the British, its theatre experienced different spatial, and consequently, thematic and technical dislocations and relocations. The theories and practices of theatre underwent a change due to the emergence of a conscious nation-space. The books in this category studies the various aspects of the contemporary Bengali stage, with all its major and minor nuances, fame and notoriety, allegiances and importance. These books cover the wide range of themes, innovations, and

personalities that dominated the Bengali stage during this markedly important phase of the political and cultural history of Bengal. These books will be a good reading for those interested in cultural studies, colonialism and post-colonialism, sociology and history. Books that can be treated under this category are like the followings.

- Bandyopadhyay, Amiya; **Dekha Hoi Nai**; Proma; Kolkata; 2006.
- Bandyopadhyay, Robin; **A-Bidya Parar Avinetri**; Fotik Jal Prokashoni; Kolkata; 2006.
- Bandyopadhyay, Suresh Chandra; **Tirish Bachharer Lokayat Jiban**; Mitra and Ghosh Publication; Kolkata; 2007.
- Banerjee, Utpal; **Bengali Theatre 200 Years**; Publications Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Govt. of India; 1999.
- Banerjee, Utpal; **Glimpses of Bengali Performing Arts**; Shubhi Publications, Delhi. 2006.
- Bannerjee, Himani; **The Mirror of Class: Essays on Bengali Theatre**; Papyrus; Kolkata; 1999.
- Bhattacharya, Rimli (ed); **Black Town White Town - Nineteenth Century Calcutta**; Seagull Books; India; 1998.
- Chatterjee, Minoti; **Theatre Beyond the Threshold : Colonialism, Nationalism and the Bengali Stage 1905-1947**; Indialog; New Delhi; 2004.
- G.E. Ross, Fiona; **The Printed Bengali Character On Stage**; Curzon Press; London; 1996.
- Mukhopadhyay, Kuntal; **Theatre and politics: A study of group theatre movement of Bengal, 1948-1987**; Bibhasa; 1999.
- Raha, Kironmoy; **Bengali Theatre (India, the land and the people)**; National Book Trust; Delhi; 2001.
- Roy Chowdhury, Reba; **Jiboner Taane - Shikoror Taane**; Papyrus; 2005.

- Sen, Shova; **Nabanno Theke Laaldurgo**; National Book Agency; Kolkata; 1989.
- Silva, Neluka; **Politics and theatre: A comparative study of the construction of nation and gender in the contemporary Sinhalese and Bengali theatres**; Regional Centre for Strategic Studies; New Delhi; 1999.
- Somerset, Fiona and Watson, Nicholas (ed.); **The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity in Bengali Theatre**; Pennsylvania State University Press; November 2003.

Review of literatures in the concerned field suggests that there is a lack of any coherent thought in the study of interactions of performance and politics in our country, at large. However, inconsistent and ineloquent attempts have been made to focus on the political perspectives of modern Indian theatre in general and Bengali theatre in particular. The notable point, here, is the vogue of Performance Studies from various social scientific approaches that has generated genuine academic curiosity in countries abroad. Surely, some serious requisite of mooted such research should have been felt by our native scholars in a multi-cultural nation like India, much earlier. But, they are yet to pursue such learned activity. Thus, there is a visible gap in the availability of a sound perception in this area. The present study has been an attempt to fill the void. Subsequently, it also tried to bridge the knowledge gap, and thereby contributes to the conceptualisation of gender normativism.

## **1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The present study had been undertaken to have an understanding of the '*dynamics and transformations*' of the role of theatre in articulating the gender issues in general, and of the effervescent Group Theater movements in West Bengal in particular. The post-independence political debate in India has centred on two major issues, equity and growth. The gender concern in the recent times has been one of the major attributes of this greater debate. It is beyond doubt that the role of media, more

intensely the popular 'activist' media like theatre, in sensitizing the gender issues and transforming the gender apprehension to 'common sense', has remained a crucial dynamic in the entire discourse. The present study has focused on the nature of manipulation of political regime and market economy on the 'activist media' trying to incriminate gender as a contemporary social virtue.

Therefore, the theme of the inquiry constituted a matter of present-day significance. Unless the experience is theoretically empathized, one can hardly decipher the contemporary Indian political process that is characterized by multiple neo-social movements; nor can one act positively and rationally about it. The inferences of the present study has tried to provide valuable information about the energy and dynamic facets of the gender and media correspondence that will help policy-planners, implementers, teachers, researchers, the activists and the society at large. Herein lies the significance of the present study.

## 1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How far the existing theories in the understanding of Culture and Politics rapport are applicable to explain the projections of the gender perspective through Group Theatre productions staged during the Left Front regime in West Bengal?
- Has there been any genuine effort by way of Group Theatre productions exclusively to promote women's issues in West Bengal?
- In what way the typical Group Theatre productions in West Bengal on /encompassing women's issues have epistemologically inherited the Leftist ideological aphorism?
- Dose the ideological influence of the Leftists has been implanted to a considerable extent from the arena of Group Theatres' effort to expose women's

questions as the attributes of Globalisation and Liberal Market Economy has marched into the scenario as crucial inputs?

- How far is there any scope to envision the women's issues on stage without allegiance to the hegemony of regime or contemporary currents of market?

## **1.8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study has been historical, analytical in perspective and comparative in nature to be ascertained by both qualitative and quantitative methodology. All the relevant reports, government and other institutional sources, interviews, documents, books and articles was consulted to develop the study. Besides, several open ended interviews were undertaken to ascertain the qualitative inputs into the theme of gender, performance and politics. For the purpose personalities in the domain of art and performance, critics and academic experts in the field were interviewed.

In spite of the bigger field area of interest incorporated in the room of the thesis - it can never expect to be inclusive of all attributes and components or cannot even assert to be complete and all-embracing. Whilst keeping on a broad sketch of the chronicles of Group Theatre productions on women's issues, the study concentrated intensely on organisational dynamics of these productions. Certainly there are organisational aspects that augment the question of aesthetics. Eventually the whole historical outlook comes down to the examination of an assortment of aesthetic forms, their origin, evolution, significance and finally the inconsistencies involved.

It is this fundamental investigation of artistry that construct the theoretical skeleton of the thesis and its observable problem area, which as indicated by Bacon and Dewey are the initial phase of any research methodology and reasonably establishes the grounds to engage in the line of research. The actual problem area, is in the fact that for any performing art which has least little scope to congeal or even reproduced in exactly same aspects - aesthetics is in all probability the only feasible

agency to document theoretical schemes, observations and breakthroughs without upsetting its monist underpinnings.

The survey of available literatures indicated, analyzed and considered a wide-ranging overlook in this speciality. Instead, a very unsophisticated approach resplendent with either acclamation, longing or individual favouritisms is evident. The predicament shoots essentially from the fact the existing study on Group Theatre productions lack a cohesive “historic approach” so important for aesthetics. The present thesis in its each chapter has its own connection and own drawbacks regarding models of aesthetics but ultimately they all refer to what Dewey calls a “Justification” of the solution for the “user” (theatre activists in this case).

Collection of data denotes to information acquired at diverse stages and different levels. Sample, here, does not refer to all theatre productions which have ever been staged, Group Theatres who has produced the plays, and the female members in those Groups. Bad maintenance and lack of preservation, mobility of actors across the groups and split in the group to form a new one have impeded availability of a complete, primary data. Moreover, some were so transitory or so bland that it add little or nothing to the principle problem. From this thought, the most important and influential theatre productions related to women's issues from each year has been selected.

The second part of the sample - management is the classification of the data according to attributing factors discussed. Other sources of relevant data collected include review of books, contemporary documents, clippings from contemporary papers and magazines. Here the book assessment included not only those portraying the account of the Bengali theatre, but also the international theatre magazines to locate the imperatives of feminist theatre movement across the globe. Pamphlets, brochures, government documents and advertisements were also consulted as important data. Interviews with stalwarts of the movement like Habib Tanbir (now departed), Nadira Babbar, Usha Ganguli, Soumitra Chattopadhyay, Debshankar

Halder, Chandan Sen (Sr.), Shantilal Mukherjee, Chandan Sen (Jr), Rudraprasad Sengupta, Samik Bandopadhyay, have been recorded and used.

A participant survey has been conducted, specifically for the dissertation, through a questionnaire (enclosed), which test the performer's opinion on theatre and the inner dynamics behind the production of such theatres which they claim to have women's issues in focus and how far they have kept up with the movement's activities. The survey sample is based on judgement criteria, that is people who have been attending participating in performances of Group Theatres from 1977 to 2007.

Data collected and analyzed, clearly reflect the relationships and the reason for the formulation of the answers to the research questions. Once the data is classified and categorized and its relationship with the answer to the research question is described and discussed, these answers has been summarized and stated as research findings, till the conclusion is proved beyond doubt.

Hence, from an scholastic approach, the methodology has been a combination of Bacon's empiricism with Dewey's pragmatic conceptualizations. The steps broadly cover -

1. The identification of a problem area and the framing of the related questions, which when answered would offer an rational justification of the problem
2. Assemblage and anthology of the details pertinent to the research question which have been formed.
3. Formulation of answers to the research question those are coherent with the evidences previously simplified and which lends itself to deductive analysis in which new inferences may be envisaged.
4. Verification - the scrutiny of new inferences which are consistent with the answers of the research questions.

## 1.9. ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

Over the last three decades the 'Women and Media' debate in our country has been influenced by the larger agendas and compulsions set by policy-makers, media-planners and other influential interest groups. Having emerged from an active interaction with powerful and leading spokespersons of the women movement, many Theatre Troops and Group Theatres of the country responded by launching a 'deluge of women-oriented dramas'. However, this effort failed to sustain itself. A section of women's groups themselves became disillusioned. They felt that in an effort to give women a positive imaging, many of the patriarchal values and institutions were left unquestioned and unchallenged. In fact, the kind of issues that were projected and the solutions offered at best reflected the lives and aspirations of middle-class, urban, educated women. So unrepresentative was it that it bordered on a different kind of bias and discrimination. Broadly speaking, in the backdrop of such a context, the present dissertation is designed to contain seven chapters. The first chapter entitled 'Introduction' contains the statement of the problem of study and its significance, review of literature, and the objectives of study spelt out by the research questions.

The Second Chapter is a theoretical understanding of Performance as an act of cultural representation. This chapter is to comprehend the aesthetic and anthropological dimensions of Performance with special references to the major theories of Performance and Performativity by means of which a systematic discussion on the symbiotic relationship between theatre as performance and gender as politics has been extended. Before entering into co-relation between gender and Performance, especially Theatre, attempts have been made to explain the legacy of political theatre in India in the chapter and to resort to an explanation how a rich tradition of political theatre like ours could conceive feminist question at its core.

There can be hardly any denial of the fact that the ideological regimentation of the milieu of creativity has remained one of the needful motives of all the establishments

seeking longer occupancy of power. West Bengal under the Left Front rule had been no exception to that. It has been argued that a steady approach on the part of the ruling government to appropriate the voices of the 'theatre' in tune with its manifesto in turn of providing better infrastructure to produce more 'socially sensitive theatres'. The Third Chapter of the study has focused on the nature of government assistance to the development of the performing art like theatre and their political dividends. This chapter has also examined whether the contemporary Bengali theatre has taken a role of Leftist propagandist. But prior to that the chapter has drawn a broad sketch of the vibrant Group Theatre culture in West Bengal.

Commitment to taking forward women's issues and concerns through theatre is evident in the numerous plays produced and staged all over West Bengal by the Group Theatres cutting across the districts of the state. These Group Theatres has been consistently focusing on three major concerns of gender, culture and social activism. Nevertheless the emphasis of these organizations on gendered theatre/theatre from a feminist/gendered perspective and there hopes to act as a catalyst in the process of women's awareness and empowerment are subject to extensive critical assessment. The 4th chapter contains the primary information gathered through questionnaire, interviews, newspaper reviews, scripts and manuscripts, production brochure etc. This chapter is also an attempt to analyze the database of the entire study and the crucial notes of enquiry gathered therefore. As the 'empowered' Leftists of West Bengal consider that all sorts of social bigotry against women are inevitably rooted in the greater realm of class-exploitation, and that only with the demise of Capitalism and the onset of Socialism gender inequalities, like all other historically established inequalities, shall disappear forever, similar suggestions in the finale of the theatrical climaxes has been anticipated by majority of the mainstream Group Theatres of the region. The thrust area of this chapter shall be to look upon the routs and roots of corroboration of such normativism in the contemporary Bengali theatre.

The impact of globalization on culture and the impact of culture on globalization merit discussion. David Rothkop writes “You are either someone who is threatened by this change (impacts of Globalisation) or someone who will profit from it, but it is almost impossible to conceive of a significant group that will remain untouched by it.” Group Theatres in West Bengal has been subjected in either ways. While some earned greater enterprises sponsored by Multi-national Corporations, many are yet to. No doubt, the funding they get from these companies to organize theatre festivals are much larger than the government bursary. With this crucial point of consideration, contemporary Bengali theatre has become ‘consumer-oriented affair’ rather than any ideological ‘agitation’. Sensitization of the gender issues through theater has undergone fundamental changes, both in the ‘content’ and in the ‘form’. The fifth chapter appraises such changes from all possible angles. This chapter also attempts to study the scopes of any approach adopted by the present-day Group Theatres of West Bengal to perceive the gender issues which is capable of maintaining equidistance from the influences of the market economy and the ideological domination. To understand that, creative journey of some leading women director and playwrights has been discussed.

The following chapter is a study of an alternative theatre activism in West Bengal in the line of Theatre of the Oppressed by Augusto Boal, that has really created the silver lining of hope towards a genuine activism of theatre towards women's issues at the grass root level. Various experimental and influential attempts on the part of Janasanskriti, a group theatre at a remote corner of the state has been highlighted thereof.

The concluding chapter of the study is an attempt to indicate, and to theorize thereof, the changing patterns of media-gender-regime relationship under the influence of market economy with special reference to contemporary mainstream Group Theatre productions in West Bengal on women's issues.

Thus, the study presupposes the following tentative chapters as a part of a comprehensive dissertation.

- Chapter 1.*            **Introduction**
- Chapter 2.*            **Theoretical Framework on Relations of Politics and Performance with Special Reference to Gender and Media Debate in India.**
- Chapter 3.*            **Institutionalization of the Leftist Political Ideas through the Vibrant Group Theatre Culture in West Bengal.**
- Chapter 4.*            **Women's Issues Staged : A Critical Survey of the Contemporary Dramatic Productions of the Group Theatres of West Bengal Envisioning the Women Issues.**
- Chapter 5.*            **Imperatives of New Liberal Economy as a Crucial Input in the Construction of Women's Issues through Theatre.**
- Chapter 6.*            **Her Stories - Otherwise Told : Scope of Alternative Viewpoints on Women's Issues in the Contemporary Bengali Theatre.**
- Chapter 7.*            **Concluding Observation.**

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