

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Framework on Relations of Politics and Performance with Special Reference to Gender and Media Debate in India.

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Almost three decades of my close association with contemporary Bengali Theatre in various capacities as actor, background artist, director, manager, organizer and more, has set forth several academic issues, other than the methodologies of performance in theatre, before me to focus upon or make a journey of enquiry. The basic of all these issues is to understand what is more important to the theatre itself, to react or to create reactions? However, in both the cases, theatre is considered to be an out and out culturally integrated part of socio-political processes in the broader aspect. Thus, the proposition, in the simplest expression, outnumbers the acceptability of a view like "art is for arts' sake".

The symbiotic relation between the all round performing art called 'theatre' and the contemporary social, political, economic or cultural context is reflected in the attempts to improvise even the Classics of dramatic literature in a way that suggest to be meta-narratives or grand design to explain existing realities besides attempts to develop i.e. scripting, designing and building the theatrical productions amalgamating facts and their interpretations, expressions and blank verses common to the phenomenon of communication in the present period of time. But in both case of such attempts, the primary or crucial concern remains the relevance of the 'form' and the 'content' of the theatre in the background of existing social, political, economic or cultural scenario. Thus, theatre of an age is a product of the most comprehensive and continuous human effort to establish relevance of artistic expression in the realm of reality.

The journey of a dramatic literature from 'page' to 'stage' is completed through a critical phase called 'performance'. A performance can be, at a time, a narration, an interpretation, a suggestion, an expression, a communication and more. Performances explain, explore, add or divert 'meaning' of/from the body text. Of course, sometimes arises the issue whether 'performance' overtakes or overrides the 'literature' and its intentions or not. There can be hardly any denial of the fact that both the dramatist and the drama director owe a persona that is out and out very creative. Their views on artistry may welcomingly vary. These variations are broadly concerned over 'performativity' of a dramatic literary text or the means of performance of the same in a limited space and time. The difference of opinion is, then, at the 'Form' level, but at the 'Content' level, they share common concerns. The performance or the live presentation of the content is, therefore, an area of currents and cross-currents of interpretations of the content that probably exhibits the best connection between the art and the reality.

Theatre remain to be the most influential art of performance that may combine wide verities of dance, music, oratory, verse, acting, painting as well the scientific knowledge mixed with aesthetics in lighting, sound projection, stage set up building, make up, costume designing and many more in its scope. No stuntman, no computer graphics, no dummy or proxy actors, however. Theatre is a live show presented by a group of people connected and appropriated together by the content of the drama. A group, so organized and ordered, that their activities on the platform called 'stage' is directed towards exposing specific elucidation of the content of the drama. Theatrical performances are ever latest, as in every show of the same theatre, the series of human activities compiled in a presentation, is publicized afresh and nothing of it is mechanically automated. Thus, performance, in theatre is a conscious process of interaction between aesthetics and social, political, cultural, economic objectives. An interaction so elaborate and comprehensive that can generate a 'message' to its audience by means of elucidating the content of the drama.

2.2. WHAT IS PERFORMANCE ?

Performance, as a field of enquiry has cross-contours over social studies, political studies, anthropology, culture studies, behavioural studies, gender studies, psychology, psychoanalysis etc. that has generated overlapping and ambiguity at the semantic expression itself. The intangible term, Performance, however, somehow denotes aesthetics of human body and energy to exhibit creative thoughts and ideas.

To Marvin Carlson, the traditional concept of Performance defines the term as a display of skills, a form of art as craft. In this case, an audience is needed, and the performance becomes a public presentation of skills. [Carlson, Marvin; **Theatrical Performance : Illustration, Translation, Fulfillment or Supplement ?; *Theatre Journal***; March 1985; pp. 5-11]. For Richard Schechner, Performance is a 'restored behaviour' where the performer(s) consciously pretend to be someone or something else. Thus, a Performance separates a person performing from his/her normal reality and the 'restored behaviour' becomes prominent in theatre, rituals, masquerade etc. 'Restored behaviour', then, becomes that crucial mechanism of Performance, which works to distance the 'self' from the 'role' performed. And the mechanism is so influential that even if we act on the stage alike our usual actions of regular life, it is considered to be a Performance. [Schechner, Richard; ***Performance Theory***; Routledge; New York; 1988] Perhaps the frameworks of Performance, then, become so prominent that the viewers are conditioned to consider what they see on the stage is a Performance and not a real life incident. Carlson is of the opinion, that "The recognition that our lives are structured according to repeated and socially sanctioned modes of behaviour raises the possibility that all human activity could potentially be considered as performance, or at least all activity carried out with a consciousness of itself" [Carlson, Marvin; ***Performance. A Critical Introduction; Second Edition***; Routledge, New York & London 2004].

To Judith Butler, Gender is also a Performance as it encompasses all such sanctioned mode of conscious behaviours which are repeated to act upon a constructed reality. She, however, analyzed that, in times, our social role reveals subtle and unconscious Performance of Gender (as if, being in trance) we appropriate through adaptation of a normative mechanism by means of socialization. Sometimes even, mere our appearance may play a 'Gendered Performance'. If we think, act, behave, suggest or appear differently in respect to the gender standards of performance, it is generally considered as perverted. Therefore, our 'Gendered Performances' are stigmatised; so stigmatised that an individual from the transgender community boasts upon overacting or melodramatic performance of a particular 'Gendered Performance'. Everyone of us is, then, determined, role-modelled and habituated in the 'Gendered Performance', but only become aware of the same when there arises any situation beyond the array of these commonly adopted gender specific roles in the 'Gendered Performances'. [Butler, Judith; *Bodies that Matter*; Routledge; New York/London; 1993]

To Jasminka Markovska, "Even when the audience is one's self, a performance takes place in order to be consciously judged, valued, perceived. This understanding of performance as a conscious action differentiates it from the performative. The performative is a function of a process, in everyday life or as a part of a performance, or an unconscious repetition of learned behaviour and learned psychological reactions. We can also talk about a performative function of social "institutions" that try to create fitting, normative members. Whenever the usually normative aspect of a performative function surprises us, whenever it is unusual, we tend to value this as a negative category and label it as theatrical, marking it as something unnatural, outside the self. This is one of the main differences between a performance (social, behavioural) and the performative: the performance is done consciously, the performative is not 'really' conscious, although it can become conscious through a developed self-reflexivity. Both are learned, but 'restored behaviour' is typical for the performance. The sets of learned performative that fit into the standards of a certain society, or culture, are considered to constitute a

natural, normal self." [Markovska, Jasminka; *Performativity and Theatricality: on the Concepts and their Use*; lecture at conference Kritikk, dømmekraft og intervensjon; 8-9 May 2008; Programme of Aesthetics; Oslo University. <http://www.uio.no/studier/program/estetisk/tyrifjord8/innlegg/markovska.pdf>]

Anthropologists like Van Gennep and Victor Turner, Performance is a 'liminal' activity. Liminality, as coined by Gennep and Turner, is a state of ambiguity or disorientation that appears in the half way of any rituals being performed, where the participants are yet to be converted to post-ritual identity or status, neither the participant belongs to an identity of status he/she used to hold prior to the initiation of the ritual. Liminality leads to defencelessness and exposure of the participant to new knowledge and experience relevant to evolved state of existence. The participant, then, is bound to be guided by certain normative standards and liminality becomes operative towards re-integration of the participant to the changed state of existing identity or status. However, in cases, the outcome of the liminal experience can be a total displacement of norms, a separation from the milieu one has to re-integrate into; in such a case any norm that has lost legitimacy is replaced by a new norm and gradually the new norm becomes legitimate. [Mc. Kenzie, Jon; *Perform or Else : From Discipline to Performance*; Routledge; London; 2001] In fact, Schechner's idea of 'restored behaviour' was much influenced by the concept of liminality, where the relation between the self and the performed role, or more accurately to say, the distance between the self and the role performed is in liminality or liminoid situations.

Erica Fischer-Lichte preferred the term 'Theatricality' over Performance and argues that the term should significantly describe the aesthetics of theatre. Aesthetics that are determined by and as well composed of exclusive semiotic systems of theatre. To her, theatre, at larger scope, interprets the signs generated by a specific culture and at turns uses those signs as theatrical signs. When an Indian Classical dancer expresses the aesthetic content of the art through 'Mudra's, the dance becomes the theatrical act of using signs as Mudras and simultaneously their interpretations.

Hence, all Performances are Theatrical. The proximity of real object and their projection as signs in Theatricality is called 'Suggestions', by means of which infinite things or themes can be portrayed within the limits of a stage where the theatrical production is being presented. [Fischer-Lichte, Erika; *The Semiotics of Theatre*; Indiana University Press; Bloomington and Indianapolis; 2010]

Philip Auslander has approached Performance as the performative functions of Language. The theory is critical to standard meaning of the text and considers performance as a process of deconstruction that differentiates the exposure of the text from any standard interpretation. He attempts to deconstruct acting and performing through Derrida's concept of "*Différance*" as "meaning generated by productive non-presence". [Auslander, Philip; *From Acting to Performance: Essays in Modernism and Postmodernism*; Routledge; London; 1997]. Such an approach, however, has been criticised to have failed to understand the actual happenings on stage and to be narrowly limited in scope as there are huge number of non-dramatic, non-theatrical, not-scripted, non-ceremonial, and regular life performances that are distant from the authority of the text. The performative in a dramatic performance cannot be minimised as 'recitation of the Text', very often the Performance becomes a conscious contradiction to the power-structure of the text itself and a set of performative meanings appear to support the Performance from outside the text. W.B. Worthen remarks that as an art of citational performance, theatre does not only cite texts, but it restates them "within its own regimes" that refers to "social and behavioural practices that operate outside theatre and that constitute contemporary social life.... Although dramatic performance uses texts, it is hardly authorised by them." [Worthen, W.B; *Drama, Performativity, and Performance*; **Performance. Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies**, Volume II; Ed. Philip Auslander; Routledge; London and NY; 2003].

The Routledge Companion of Theatre and Performance has elaborated five broad common and appropriate genera of Performance and performativity. These are -

A. An act of, a live event before an audience, which has been designed, improvised and rehearsed for many a times before showcasing. Theatre production, Puppetry, Mime, Dance, Music, Street Show, Live Presentation characterised by the quality of liveliness and communication with the audience, comes to this category.

B. All types of Social Behaviour, may be natural or inborn or may be learned or adopted, remains to performative functions.

C. Success and Achievement, is also an approach of Performance in the capitalist paradigm of social values, as 'not performing well' rests to failure. Sports Performance, Sexual Performance, Performance of machines are the examples of such category.

D. Body Art and Live Physical Acts that are Post-Modern forms of performing art that thrusts upon deconstructing firm and established ideas and identities in aesthetics, culture and social constructs. Sometimes, to pursue political claims, these approaches to Performance may boast upon the existing structure of meaning of ideas and identities too.

E. The term Performance is also used to denote 'Performance as deconstructive performance' as Allain and Harvie write, Performance works "to challenge naturalistic characterization and narration in order to question the apparent truth 'shown' by representational forms". [Allain, Paul and Harvie, Jen; *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance* ; Ed. by Paul Allain and Jen Harvie; Routledge; New York; 2006]. Post-Modern Performance uses "deconstructive and meta-theatrical performance strategies that foreground process over product, interrogate theatrical illusionism and resist offering stable, conclusive meanings"[*ibid.*; 2006]

My concern in the studies of Performance and theatre associates predominantly to take note how Performance as an organised social event or our social choices to

publicity is influenced by the socio-political structure of Power. There can be hardly any denial of the fact that our social choices and behaviours determines our sense of aesthetics and our tastes. Thus studying Performance in lieu to power structure not only emphasises the external relationship of socio-political environment and artistry, but also has significant implications in understanding the complex internal connections of various psycho-cultural traits within Performance. In our world and time 'Culture' itself is a contested term. However, with the force-driven connection of culture, force of globalized commerce, urbanization and avid search of resources, including the resources of aesthetic inspiration, the possibilities of conflict and challenges relating to understanding and acceptance of other's culture, identity and attitude has intensified. Therefore, the public space of Performance has also become an arena of such conflict and challenges to explore and learn.

2.3. ON THE INTERACTION OF POLITICS AS CONTENT AND PERFORMANCE AS FORM

Here, I would cite my own fond memory of intimate interaction with Utpal Dutta, one of the stalwart of Bengali Theatre, in the post-soviet period, to have confessed that "As an activist in Theatre, I presume, I am an agitator, I am a propagandist." Such a conviction is, of course, rooted in the perception that although in the academic domain we often consider culture to be embodying rituals and traditions of a society, including its language, art, edicts, and religion and remains unbiased to these, in actuality, culture is no way neutral. Much of what is portrayed as common culture is choosy broadcast of class-dictated values. Antonio Gramsci explicitly exposed, while speaking of class hegemony, that the state is only the "outer ditch behind which there [stands] a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks," a complex arrangement of cultural values and institutions by and large not considered as political. [Gramsci, Antonio; *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*; International Publishers; New York; 1971]. What we generally claim to be "our culture" is essentially reflective of contemporary hegemonic compositions within the social array, convincingly sympathetic to certain class-interests over others.

Performance is, also, not an abstract force that floats in virtual world; it is mediated through social structure, social relations, social principles and so forth. If Performance is treated as nothing more than simple build up of practices and solutions, then Performance is being considered at its face value.

In academic arena, exponents of postmodernism recommend their own form of cultural relativism. They decline the notion that human awareness can surpass culture. According to them, all kinds of wisdom are featured by social paradigms. To estimate any culture from a stage of permanent and highest truths, they opine, is a perilous scheme that frequently includes the seeds of further severe forms of domination. But then, even if there are no supreme truths, this does not signify all awareness is completely culture-bound. People from extensively diverse societies and from different epoch in history can still identify varieties of class, ethnic, and gender domination in numerous cultures across ages and places. Though it is a fact that culture pervades all our perceptions, it is not the sum of human experience.

As the industrial economy has grown in influence and power, much of the Culture and its Performances has been confiscated and commodified. The use value of Culture and Performance is gradually being overtaken by their exchange value. As of today, we produce less of our culture and acquire more of it, until it reduces to a 'fusion' of confused features. A widely larger portion of our culture is now appositely labeled as "mass culture," "popular culture," and sometimes "media culture," possessed and managed generally by big business conglomerates with primary interest to accrue assets and prepare the world secure for their proprietors. The reach of culture and its performance is then limited only to the exchange value rather than use value, social control rather than social creativity. Public preferences become much more accustomed to cultural junks, fast foods, big hypes, cheap pranks, flashy gossips, violent reactions, instantaneously exciting, and frantically shallow submissions. Albeit purportedly apolitical in its objectives, this popular culture or mass culture or media culture (which has already developed as the entertainment industry) is very much political in its influences, proliferating visions

and values that are time and again completely sexist, racist, consumerist, authoritarian, militaristic, and imperialist.

As a matter of fact, a vibrant working-class culture subsisted, during the period between 19th century to the mid-20th century, in the form of union get together, music and dances, verses and literatures, theater and performances, night schools, summer camps, co-operatives and mutual assistance societies, majority of which were arranged by anarchists, socialists, and communists, and their various front groups. But these ceased to exist under the hazardous twin explosion of commodification of culture through Tele-media imperialism and McCarthyism. This course of action, whereby a profit-ambitious mass culture or popular culture or media culture anticipates people's culture, is expanding vigorously all over the world, Utpal Dutta, as committed critic of cultural imperialism, had spoken in obvious idioms to remind that the task of any conscious cultural activist would be to agitate and propagate against the hegemony of Capital in the realm of culture.

Althusser has argued "A painter, a writer or a musician proposes new ways of perceiving, of seeing, of hearing, of feeling, etc. ... We can put forward the hypothesis that a great work of art is one which, at the same time that it acts in ideology, separates itself from it by constituting a functioning critique of the ideology which it elaborates, by making an allusion to manners of perceiving, or feeling, or hearing, etc., which, freeing themselves from the latent myths of the existing ideology, transcend it. . . . Art acts in every manner upon the immediate relation with the world, producing a new relation with the world rather than producing knowledge as science does. Therefore, it has a distinct function; although formally, the scheme of the rupture with ideology and the relative independence of the work which results is the same in the case of the ideology-science relation as in the ideology-art relation..." [Althusser, Louis; *Polemica sobre Marxismo y Humanismo*, Siglo XXI. 1968, p. 194.]

Tussles against the predominant culture can seek to transform and forbear it, and in occasion can make an effort to conquer its supremacy. However, subordinate

cultures may not all the time involve into exposed discord with the predominant culture. Subordinate cultures can prevail for a considerable period with the predominant culture, negotiating scopes and spaces that may appear within the predominant culture, or by managing inner-avenues into the predominant culture. But, even then, the tussle between the two cultures persists in a covert fashion, often ensuing in the impression that the predominant culture has effectively and enduringly captivated the subordinate cultures into a uniform, harmonized, standardized, consistent, identical mass culture or popular culture or media culture. Subordinate classes, who observe that their culture is infiltrated and subjugated by the culture of the hegemonic class, can, however, obtain means of articulating and accomplishing, in their exclusive cultures, awareness of their place in social gamut and sufferings as a subordinate class.

Althusser's explanation of cultural production as an undertaking contained by ideology that is capable of untying itself from that ideology by means of a critical appraisal of specific allegories innate to that ideology, further asserts that exceeding such immediate relations between the two is viable by way of cultural manifestations. Fresh relations can be constructed in culture. Whether such fresh relations would be revolutionary or not can only be decided by understanding their relation to, and effect on the broader aspect of ideological class struggle. Any music, or a painting, or, for that matter, a theatre, or work of art can be designated as revolutionary if it act to decompose the hegemony of the ruling class.

The chronicles of theatre reveal a prosperous tradition of dramatic performances concentrating on socio-political agenda and currents that has deep or considerable impact in public life to seek attention, consciousness and reaction of the people. The Satires performed by the comic poets at the amphitheatres played influential role in the articulation, aggregation and exposition of public opinion in Hellenic democracies. Although the performance of Drama had ritualistic significance in the then Athenian society, the dramatists enhanced the scope of such performances towards examination of political issues and their relevance in the running of Polis or city-state centric rule. The splendours of such open-minded criticism of politically

controversial and critical themes are drafted in the works of Sophocles, Euripides, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Agathon and many others.

In the age of Renaissance, Shakespeare's plays were challenging the Christian traditional morality and ethos. "In his critique of *King Lear*, Swinburne valorizes Hellenic aestheticism over Christian morality, and argues that this play proves Shakespeare's sympathy with radical political causes. Indeed, Swinburne's rhetoric in *King Lear* inverts traditional reading of the play by promoting agnosticism over Christianity, aestheticism over morality. Swinburne appropriates Shakespeare, to further radical agenda which prompted liberal politics, agnostic religion and Hellenic aestheticism." [Sawyer, Robert; *Victorian Appropriations of Shakespeare : George Eliot, A.C Swinburne, Robert Browning and Charles Dickens*; Associated University Press; London; 2010; p. 50]. Critiques also observe the portrayal of struggle between various social groups in the Roman republics was central to Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, which is amid the minority of Shakespeare tragedies proscribed in a democracy in modern times. The drama was temporarily censored in France during late 1930s on the allegation that it exhibits certain fascist aspects, and Slavoj Zizek, recorded its embargo in Post-War Germany on the ground of its content of severe militarism.[Zizek, Slavoj; *Living in the End Times*; Verso; Slovenia; 2011; p. 432]

In subsequent centuries, political theatre has evolved in depth and range. Eventually political theatre has associated itself with cabaret performances and indigenous folk theatre. Under the semblance, political theatre has cultivated itself as an agency of authentic alternative interaction inside the civil societies that are being ruled by oppressive governments and worked to proliferate the critical judgmental thought.

Political theatre, therefore, is a conscious attempt to endorse specific political stand or ideals, the most organized and comprehensive endeavour in this regard may be traced, in the recent history, in the left wing culturalism called Agitprop in erstwhile Soviet Russia, which gradually appeared as a methodology of phenomenal development of Marxist aesthetics amongst the global Lefts. Agitprop theatre as a highly politicized left-wing approach originated in 1920s to feature cardboard

characters of flawless righteousness and absolute evil and its uncouth deride. Later the term became operational in any context whereby highly agitational contents were being performed in the arena of theatre.

Marxist aesthetics in theatre found further highly elaborate and sophisticated impetus in Bertolt Brecht's methodology of Epic Theatre. Brechtian approach to theatre methodology was far more rational than Agitprop. He introduced the mechanism of Alienation (*Verfremdungseffekt*) in theatre where an actor or group of actors suddenly use to start active communication with the audience, putting a halt in the story-telling, to wake them up from their involvement in the entertainment of the storyline and follow the inner ideological message of the dramatic content. This method emphasizes the socio-political content of drama, rather than its emotional manipulation of the audience or on the production's formal beauty. Brechtian approach became highly acclaimed in the Indian sub-continent and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Augusto Boal built on the Brechtian construct of *Lehrstücke* into an internationally admired technique of *Theatre of the Oppressed*, with its pervasive varieties of 'forum theatre' and 'invisible theatre'. Boal intended to break the four walls of a theatre hall, which he considered, elitist, and built theatre with portable, flexible and inexpensive components and items. In the perspective of those less-represented in a society, his style is effective as arms against tormenters. For Boal, there are three attributes of the aesthetic plot. First, is Plasticity, means that one may be somebody or something without actually being that entity. Objects can obtain diverse meaning like a piece of long cloth can substitute a river. He avows that just the duration and location of the object matters, rest all its features are counted as temporal and location can be changed. Second, is the Dichotomy of the Space, i.e. the performing arena may conceive several layers of aesthetic spaces. This scheme insinuates that there are spaces within a space. The stage is in front of the audience is a space as a whole, yet the actors may create a market, a royal court, a roadway in between, a forest at a time within that whole space by means of suggestions and communications in theatrical language. Third, is Tele-microscopic. This idea denotes that it is difficult to

put out of sight while some one is on the performing space. Each part and property of the space is visible and it may assemble the distant things in close-up views. Such as, the peak of the Mount Everest can be made visible on stage by means of performance and a man to climb it if the content demands a situation like this. Boals contribution ignited the emergence of Third Theatre movement across the world and the minimalistic approach, based on less properties, less stagecraft, less costume, less arrangements and more of choreography, more of bodily suggestions, more active participation without achieving much acting skill, became predominant methodology of political theatres. Theatre, then, moved out of its regular spaces and halls to be performed on streets, open spaces at the factory gates, market premises and places of public attention.

Peter Weiss was the founder of Documentary approach towards political theatre during 1960s following Erwin Piscator, an ardent enthusiast of Brechtian Epic Theatre. Weiss extensively used still photographs and cinematic projections as well as complex scaffold stages to visualize historical plots based on which the drama has been produced. The theme would, then, become more convincing to the audience and the intellectual penetration becomes far more deep to understand the scenario the content of the drama has indicated. Later, in Birmingham of United Kingdom, regular productions of Documentary Theatre was institutionalized by Banner Theatre Company. Docu-Theatre (popular shortened name of Documentary approach to political theatre) as a method of political theatre was welcomed in industrially developed European countries due to its authentic basis of statement making and rational tactics of drawing inferences to contemporary contexts.

In 1947, Julian Beck and Judith Malina introduced the Living Theatre, where actors used to dissolve the 'fourth wall' between them and the audience sitting in dark before them. They use to walk down to the empty seats in the hall and seat next to a viewer to discuss what could be possibly happen after they have suddenly put a dramatic situation at a halt on the stage and use to mould the performance in the desired direction compiling the advocacies of the audience. Thus, the theatre becomes a 'living' business in every show producing variety of conclusions. Since its

inception, The Living Theatre was committed in transforming the establishment of power within society from a aggressively competitive, exclusively hierarchical formation to a more accommodating and collective appearance. Living Theatre make an effort to do so by working against aesthetic complacency in the audience through straight manifestation, therefore, adopting the Brechtian way of communication through dramaturgy. Living Theatre contradict the mercantile orientation of Broadway productions and have led to the off-Broadway theater movement in New York City, producing poetic dramas. Living Theatre, during its heydays in 1960s, speaking against the Vietnam War, used to drive the audience to undergo a critical standpoint on the events being dramatized or shown in the projection and developing an approach called Theatre of Cruelty following the practices of French Surrealist Antonin Artaud, is considered the pioneering left-wing political theatre movement in United States of America.

Comparatively less radical trends of political theatre emerged in the West adopting a Realist approach to probe political behaviour of social man and Arthur Miller was the man behind it. Miller effectively amalgamated varied dramatic approaches and movements in the conviction that a dramatic piece should represent a sensitive equilibrium between the individual choice and social responsibility, between the curious persona and the polity, between the distinct and commune constituents of life. He also figure on the Realist tradition of Henrik Ibsen in his investigation of the individual's discord with society as well sponged Symbolist and expressionist performances from Bertolt Brecht.

A more recent form of political theatre appeared after feminist authors Elfriede Jelinek and Caryl Churchill. Jelinek, who own the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2004 has specific political take, in particular her feminist standpoint and her attachment with Communist Party, are vital part of the grounds for the controversy intended for Jelinek and her work. Jelinek identified three major and interconnected "targets" in her writing: Firstly, the capitalist consumerist social edifice and its sustained and chronic venture towards commodification of all human beings and their relationships; Secondly, the affects of residues of Austria's (her native land) fascist

past in civic and personal life; and Thirdly, organized exploitation and subjugation of women in a capitalist-patriarchal society. Caryl Churchill's works of dramatizing the mistreatments of power and exploration of sexual politics through feminist themes and her adoption of non-naturalistic procedures in theatre building has set further the routes of future prospect of Feminist Theatre. Her early works grew under the influential Bertolt Brecht's modernist dramatic and theatrical techniques of Epic Theatre to delve into problems of gender and sexuality.

There surfaced several other version of political theatre in the last century in the branding of Black Theatre, based on anti-apartheid issues and racist politics; Green Theatre, focusing the environmental concerns and politics of global waste management and bio-preservation; Pink Theatre, voicing the human rights of Lesbian-Gays-Bisexual-Transgender community in the line of the new social movements being popular worldwide. What they share in common in the inner spirit is their anti-establishment stance within the contemporary social-political systems.

2.4. LEGACY OF POLITICAL THEATRE IN INDIA

Political theatre in India has a profound legacy since 15th century when Bhakti Movement sprang out as a protest to typical domination of Brahmanism in the traditional Hindu society. Bhakti poets and saints spread and sustain the spirit of assimilative and inclusive religious culture as against the mainstream Varna system prevalent in India throughout the length and breadth. The Kirtana and the Krishna Katha acts introduced by Sri Chaitanya in Nadia district of Bengal can be marked as a pioneering effort in this regard. Researchers have shown that at Vijayanagar in 1504, the ruler Veer Narasimhadeva Raya, sentenced some Kuchipudi dancers to death after their performance enacting the gruesome sufferings used by the oppressor king to extract taxes from the poor peasants. [Rao, Banda Kanakalingeshwara; *The Kuchipudi Dance Drama*; Marg; March 1966 issue; Hyderabad; p. 33].

The more prominent and impactful phase of political theatre in India began in the late 19th Century when dedicated patriots took theatre as an instrument against the suppressive restrictions imposed by colonial rulers on the publication and performance of anti-government dramas. Dinabandhu Mitra published *Neel Darpan* in 1860 depicting the agony of the Bengali indigo cultivators being ruthlessly persecuted by the British planters. The play provoked strong public sentiment in Bengal against British rule and overlay the way for a host of nationalist literary and dramatic works along similar lines elsewhere in the country. *Neel Darpan* was staged in Dhaka in 1861 and in the same year Reverend James Long translated the play into English for which he was imprisoned for a month under the charge of sedition. Great National Theatre, chaired by noted Bengali dramatist Girish Chandra Ghosh, produced *Neel Darpan* at Kolkata in 1872. In subsequent years plays like *Jamidar Darpan*(1873) based on peasant rebellion against the land-owning babus by Mir Masarraf Hossain, *Cha-Kar-Darpan*(1873) dealing with the poor working conditions at the British tea-estates in North Bengal and *Jel Darpan* (1975) depicting the terrible life of prisoners in the jail houses of Bengal by Dakshinaranjan Chattopadhyay, *Gajadananda O Jubaraj*(1976) by Amritalal Basu, a satirical account of a barrister named Jagadananda who had entertained the visiting Prince of Wales in his house and allowed the womenfolk of his family to meet him breaking the traditional practice of veil, *Surendra Binodini* (1876) by Upendranath Das on the similar spirit. Both the plays were promptly closed down by the government after the second night. "The Great National Theatre, in protest, launched a new production overnight, a skit--The Police of Pig and Sheep--ridiculing Mr. Hogg and Mr. Lamb, two high ranking British Police Officials. That same night Basu and seven others were arrested from the premises of the theatre, not for the satirical piece but the apolitical featured production of the night on account of obscenity. The charge was challenged in the court and the theatre won the case, but not before the Dramatic Performances Control Act had been passed". [Chatterjee, Sudipto; *Performing (Domi-)nation : Aspects of Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengali Theatre*; <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/su/southasia/TESTold/Sudipto.html>]

Foundation of Indian National Congress in 1885 gave stimuli to many playwrights who opted to propagate the spirit of nationalism in veil allegories, for which they resorted to Hindu mythological narratives that pronounced the win over evil spirits. Prabhakar Khadilkar produced *Keechakbadha* (1906) in Marathi in based on an episode of Mahabharata where the mighty Bhima killed Keechaka, who wanted to quench his lecherous desires by forcing Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas, to immoral conjugation with him. Along with many other Marathi musical opera from noted playwrights of the day like Govind Ballal Deval, Ram Ganesh Gadkari, Annasaheb Kirloskar, *Keechakbadha* was banned by the colonial masters. After the partition of Bengal in 1905, Girish Chandra Ghosh produced *Siraj-ud-Daullah*, *Mir Kasim* and *Chhatrapati Shivaji*, three most powerful allegories based on the historical accounts of heroes who stood against the oppression from the rulers. All of these were banned again under Dramatic Performance Act.

In the milieu of political theatre in India, the influence Socialist and Communist ideologies became prominent since late 30s. The accomplishment of Socialism in Soviet Russia thrilled the Indian playwrights and dramatists to design theatre to incite the spirit of both anti-colonial struggle as nearer objective and class struggle as the distant yet final goal. Thus, appeared in 1942, the most significant organization, Indian Peoples Theatre Association (IPTA). IPTA initiated its move as a modest associate of the Left-wing Anti-Fascist Writers and Artists Fraternity based in Calcutta. All legendary stalwarts in the arena of creative writing, painting and performance folk together to tour the country performing to aid the victims of the ruinous famine in Bengal in 1943 under the banner of IPTA. The famine took lives of more than two million people, moreover the rampant corruption, black marketing worsen the situation to catastrophe. Bijan Bhattacharya composed *Nabanna* in 1944, which became the first major offering of IPTA's dramatic productions. "It was not clear and probably never will be whether the IPTA, as it was called, was born of a positive directive of the Communist Party of India, or whether it came about through the anti-fascism of the war years with some remote identity with the

international artistic movement of progressive forces..." [Benegal, Shyam; *Theatre's Commitment*; Enact; No. 39; March, 1970; p. 39].

Enthusiasm and deep impact of IPTA's role towards promoting progressive and pro-people political views loomed large at pan-India level. In Orissa, Kalicharan Pattanayak composed and produced *Bhata* in 1943 and *Raktamati* in 1945 dealing with the problems of untouchability and hunger among the poor peasants of Orissa. In Kerala, K. Damodaran wrote and directed *Pattabakki* in 1944 to expose the exploitative nature of Indian traditional landlordism. One of the IPTA's effective means to pursue political propaganda in acceptable forms to the commons was to develop upon the time-honored folk form of arts. As in Andhra Pradesh, the volunteers of IPTA adopted Burrakatha, age-old popular form of story-telling with drummers and singers to produce *Veethi Natakam* and *Yakshagana*. In Maharashtra also, Tamasha form of folk act was appropriated by IPTA activists to spread the doctrine of class struggle. Sahir Annabhao Sathe produced *Aklechi Goshte* in 1944, to popularize the communist wags in Maharashtra.

"Despite of its ingenious experimentations and national character, the IPTA suffered a major setback when ideologies were polarized within the association after independence in 1947. Many disenchanted artists left the organization in protest as they felt their works were being misused by the Communist Party." [Sengupta, Sachin; *People's Theatre in India*; Unity, Volume - 2; Dec. 1952-Jan. 1953; p. 8] However, Communist Party of India continued to worth of the viability of IPTA and the potentials of its theatres in various regional strongholds as mediums of propaganda. In 1952, the Kerala People's Art Club of Trivandrum staged *Ningalenne Communistakki* and was performed for 600 times to have created a mass impact towards installing the first ever Communist government in the country in 1957. Congress Party in Kerala immediately stroke back with Keshaba Dev's *Jnanippo Communistavum* designed to expose the misrules of the communist government in 1958. In subsequent years dramatic productions like *Manthriyakkolle*, *Bhagawan Macaroni*, *Kotu Krishi* were launched to retrieve voters by the either parties.

An unequivocal advocate of the use of radical content in theatre, Utpal Dutta, founded Peoples Little Theatre in 1947 at Calcutta. During early 50s, PLT produced street dramas and skits voicing the demand of the Communist Party to release the political prisoners. P.L.T, in following years, produced dramas like *Kallol*, another milestone creation in the legacy of political theatre of India by Utpal Dutta reflecting a leftist review of India's history of struggle for freedom in the light of Naval Uprising in 1946. Dutta and his associates were arrested and put to jail, news agencies refused to publish the advertisement of the show under pressure from the government, yet *Kallol* became a big hit amongst the commons chanting the popular slogan "Kallol Cholchhe, Cholbe". In 1960, *Angar* was composed and produced to expose the inhumane exploitation of coal mine laborers who were despised to death in the risk under the ground. During the course of Naxalbari Movement, an attempt of armed peasant rebellion in northern districts of West Bengal, Utpal Dutta gave the clarion call "on one hand we have the road that leads to Naxalbari, and on the other there is a road to 'Beshya-Bari' (the brothel).... We must chose our way... revolutionary theatre must preach revolution; it must not only expose the system, but also call for the violent smashing of the state machine" [Gunawardhana, A.J; *Theatre as a Weapon : An Interview with Utpal Dutta*; The Drama Review, No. 15, (Spring, 1970); p. 225] In 1967, his *Teer* and *Din Badaler Pala* and Anal Gupta's *Rakter Rong* romanticized the peasant-guerrillas who were assaulted by the police and military in Naxalbari.

Conceivably instigated by the endeavors of Utpal Dutta, students of Miranda House College, New Delhi produced *India'69* in 1970, a high end criticism of almost all political institutions of India and the bi-furcated Communist Party. They also criticized the scheme of nationalization of Banks by the government in a drama named *Mary Had A Little Lamb*.

Gradually, theatre became an useful tool of propaganda for various programmes and manifestations by Left Trade Unions, Student Organizations, Peasants

Associations in collaboration with the cultural wing of the party. With the installation of Left Front government in West Bengal and its adoption of Land Reforms policy and Panchayat System for rural development, theatre became a major agency of preaching the gospel of success of public policies of the government. Government, in return, extended resources to the theatre activists to fund Lokoranjana Shakha or the field publicity wing of the government under the Information and Cultural Ministry. Lokoranjana Shaka produced several dramatic productions like *Gulshan* (1975), *Amar Mati* (1982), *Hiseb Nebar Pala*(1983), *Dena Paona* (1984), *Rahumukta* (1985), *Rather Rashi* (1986) some of which were noted works of Rabindranath Tagore.

Besides the Lefts, C.N. Annadurai in Madras swayed public opinion through his dramatic production *Chandrodayam* in 1943 and pursued his party, Dravida Kalagham, to consider theatre as an official political programme [Shivathamby, Kartigesu; *Politicians as Players*; The Drama Review, Number 15; Spring 1970; p. 220]. Leaders like T.V. Narayanaswami, M. Karunanithi, E. Nedunchalian, K.A. Mathialokan joined him to produce political plays during that period that stipulated sovereign independence for the four linguistic divisions of South India, establishment of a casteless society abandoning the Brahminical traditions, advocacy for re-marriage of the widows and inter-caste marriage etc. In 1949 Dravida Kalagham was experienced a split to form Dravida Munnetra Kalagham (D.M.K) and the newly formed party continued to boast up on theatre as an important media of political communication till late 50s unless the talkies became popular and D.M.K quickly moved to take advantage of the impact of cinema in Tamil minds, to convey political messages through cinema.

In contrast to Communist Party of India, the DMK or the Congress Party has been rather sluggish to pick up theatre as a media of political propaganda. And that is why, most of the trends in political theatre in India links to Left political camp. Mention of Safdar Hashmi and his Jana Natya Mancha is a must here, for Safdar being the most discussed case of political assassination of a Leftist cultural activist,

killed during his performance of a street theatre *Halla Bol* on 1st January, 1989. Hashmi was a communist playwright, director, actor, lyricist to have composed several street plays like *Aurat* (1975), *Machine* (1978), *Aphar Bhaichare Ka* (1979), *Gaon Se Sahar Tak* (1980), *Hatyare* (1982) and many more. His martyrdom is observed as National Street Theatre Day in the country by the cultural activists after his wife Malayashree Hashmi led Jana Natya Mancha to Jhandapur Village of Sahibabad in the Ghaziabad District of Uttar Pradesh where Safdar was brutally killed political hooligans to perform the unfinished show of *Halla Bol* on 2nd January, 1989.

The chronology of Indian political theatre is a persistent one and may be considered as a subject matter of further research from many aspects. Critics sometime note the feeble literary merit and less aesthetic value of political theatres, yet they hardly can underestimate the objective and motivation behind such artistry.

2.5. INTERACTION OF GENDER AND THEATRE

Since 1980s, the Feminist studies have also examined and revealed how women have been successful in making space for themselves in larger dimensions or voicing themselves to utmost clarity. Recent Feminist researches has tried to illustrate that the women has made their presence felt by means of their active roles, and has proved to host a coherent culture and their powers are real. The presence of women in contemporary regime of theatre has been studied within the framework of such latest Feminist studies.

As a matter of fact, of all the performing and non-performing arts, theatre traditionally remained the one where women had least opportunity to participate due to patriarchal hurdles. But the scenario has momentarily changed to have widen the scope for women to built their identity on the stage and utilize the space of theatre to develop an image larger than life. Theatre, in turn, in its theme and characters, management and promises, has worked on gender equation, sensitively.

Feminist Theatre, as discourse and scholarship has set forth and took shape since 1960s. As Feminist Theatre has become an exciting and important cultural form, Helen Keyssar illustrates the diversity and depth of the field and that pose key questions about the relations of drama to gender and states "although plays about women have existed since the origin of drama, the plays by women have been written and performed in the Western world at least since Sappho" and by the 60s "Feminist Theatre emerged as a distinct theatrical genre" [Keyssar, Helen; *Feminist Theatre and Theory*; Palgrave; 1995; p. 132]. Taisha Abraham has gone to mark two corresponding reasons behind such distinction of Feminist Theatre, "first, the resurgence of women's movement in America; and, second, the Avant-Garde Movement in European theatre that radicalized American Drama in the sixties and helped create a "revisionary" framework in which women dramatists could experiment" [Abraham, Taisha; *Feminist Theory and Modern Drama*; Pencraft International; New Delhi; 1998]. In the subsequent decades, the 'women' strongly observed in Western theatre, come to challenge the age old male construct of the setting.

All though the discourses on Feminist Theater has been largely Eurocentric and has ignored the possibilities of a Third World version of Feminist Theatre, there has been a consistent process of gendering the theatre in India and band of women playwrights, directors, actresses, critics and commentators extended vigorous efforts to surface women's issues through theatre since late 80s. Dramatic scripts have been developed based on the literary works of Maitreyi Devi, Ashapura Devi, Leela Majumdar, Mahasweta Devi, Bani Basu, Nabanita Dev Sen, Suchitra Bhattacharya, Tilottama Majumder in Bengali; Balamani Amma, K. Saraswati, Lalithambika Antharjanam, Asitha, Indu Menon in Malayalam; Malati Bedekar, Kamal Desai, Gauri Deshpande, Girijabai Kelkar in Marathi; Varsha Adalia, Esha Dadawala, Dhiruben Patel in Gujrati; Nirmal Prabha Bordoloi, Indira Raisom Goswami in Assamese; Ismat Chughtai, Saliha Abid Hussain, Zahida Zaidi in Urdu; C.S. Lakshmi, Raghaban Chudamani, Manjula Padmanavan in Tamil; Neelam Mansingh

Chowdhury, Ajita Kaur, Nirupama Dutt in Punjabi; Mridula Garg, Anju Makhija, Chitra Mudgal in Hindi and many more.

While the Indian women authors persisted in writing on complex concerns such as sensuality, suppression, isolation, exodus, identity crisis, free sex etc. they were being criticized to be inferior to their male counterparts for their projection in canvas that was still narrow and they for the most part limited themselves to the portrayal of the household space and their encounters with it. Notwithstanding the inadequacies they have explicitly inflated the awareness about the woman's position, role and responsibility in the society. The exposure of women as an individual through a women writer's creative depiction remain always practical, accurate and as such authentic. Representation by women of their issues by male playwrights is inclined to be a insignificantly unpersuasive as they fail to comprehend the female psyche and viewpoint, at the outset. Female author's writing strive to oppose the male supremacy, despotism, partition, alienation and marginalization and in doing so argues from an altogether distinctive angle and attitude. Women performers were habituated to perform, in the earlier phases of political theatre in India, awfully contentedly with the scripts developed by gents playwrights. They had been vocal to what has been written by male dramatists and expressed their own choices as was intended by male directors. The status of women on stage was nothing more than a creative imagination of male artists. We can take note of a particular situation of Utpal Dutta's "*Tiner Talowar*" to understand the situation best. Moyna, the women vegetable vender was trained to become the worthy actress by the director of Bengal Opera, a 19th century theatre company, Benimadhab Chattopadhyay alias Kaptan (Captain) Babu. The proprietor of the theatre company, wealthy Babu, Birkrishna Dan wishes to occupy her as his kept by fixing a deal with Beni in exchange of the propriety. Moyna, out of gust says -

ময়না :: পারবোনা, থিয়েটার ছাড়া বাঁচতে পারবো না! এরাই পিতামাতা ভাইবোন সব, এদের পথে বসিয়ে চলে যেতে পারবোনা। আবার গরীব হয়েও যেতে পারবোনা। [...] সোপান বেয়ে ধীরে ধীরে উঠেছি এখানে, গায়ে উঠেছে গয়না, পায়ের কাছে হাতজোড় করে ধন্য দিয়ে পড়ে আছে কনকেকতার বড়লোকের দল - আবার ধাপে ধাপে নেমে গিয়ে গেরস্তের ঘরে বাঁ-গিরি আমি করতে পারবো না! [...] আমি কনকেকতাকে পেয়েছি হাতের মুঠোয়। আমি ওই বাবুদের পেয়েছি পায়ের

তলায়। আর অভিনয় করে কখনো হয়েছি রাজকুমারী, কখনো নবীনা তপস্বিনী, কখনো রুদ্ররোষ সম্রাজ্ঞী
রিজিয়া। সেসব আমি ছাড়বোনা !

[I can't live but theatre. This is family to me. I can't leave them in misery. To become beggar again, as I was, is next to impossible for me. I have climbed to this stage. I have earned both money and fame. that was certainly not to become a married slave to a household. I have won the hearts of Kolkata, the rich Babus are at my feet, being an actress I have played the role of Princes to monk and even as a despot like Rizia. I shall never quit acting!]

বেশীমাধব :: [...] এ কে? এ তো আমার সৃষ্টি! এর সবটাই তো আমার! এই রূপ, কথা, চিন্তাধারা, খ্যাতি, অভিনয়, প্রশংসা - সব আমি গড়েছি! [...] এক মুহূর্ত আমার শিক্ষা ফিরিয়ে নিলে এর জীভ আড়ষ্ট হয়ে যাবে, বিকৃত উচ্চারণে কদর্য ভাষা বলতে বলতে ভদ্রঘরের মেয়ে আবার নর্দমার ঘৃণ্য কুকুরীর রূপ পরিগ্রহ করবে! একদিন স্টেজে একটা আলোক একটু তেরটা করে মুখে মারলে এর রূপ ধুসে কঙ্কালের অস্থিসার বীভৎসতা বেরিয়ে আসবে। এর সবই আমি দিয়েছি। সেসব ফেরৎ দাও, তারপর যেখানে ইচ্ছে যাও, আমার কিছুই এসে যায় না!

[Look at her! She is my creation! All mine! This beauty, uttering, thought, fame, acting, life - everything is my design. If I separate my spirit from her, she shall turn into an ugly speaking bitch by the side of a garbage floating drain, all her glamour shall obliterate once a light from a critical angle falls upon her face and she shall remain nothing more than a skinny skeleton. Whatever she owes is mine. Once she give me back what all I gave her, she is free to go anywhere she prefer, I don't bother.]

Although several male playwrights spoke about women's subjects, for obvious reasons, their production fail short of the genuine appearance of women's sentiments and sensitivity. The reverse is perhaps proper of the women writers.

Women as directors were rarely visible in Indian theatre since generations, but the situation has taken a formative turn when band of women directors come to improvise their creative desires while building theatre of their own or adopting a script as a tool to propagate the feminist approach to life and artistry. Few of such distinguished directors are like Laxmi Chandra, Chama Ahuja, Arundhati Raje, Ipshita Chandra, Usha Ganguli, Sohag Sen, Neelam Mansingh Chaudhury, Amal

Allana, Rani Balbir Kaur, Bhagirathi Bai Kadam, Sheila Bhatia, Bombay Jayashree, Saumya Verma, Gauri Dattu, Nadira Babbar, Anuradha Kapur. These personalities have gone to create an indigenous and unique identity of Indian feminist theatre. Vibrant use of live dance and music, intense and reflective use of colour and darkness, majority numbers of female actors to interplay and most importantly a women's or group of women to narrate in their verbatim instead of a male Kathanak or Sutradhara marks a considerable reframing of theatrical language in India to support the case for a vivacious Feminist theatre in India.

Whilst women dramatists and directors were engaged creating the larger canvas for the appropriation of increasing number of female performers in theatre to act upon a women centric approach in theatre, participation of women as actors were being encouraged both qualitatively and quantitatively. A series of theatre festivals and workshops were organized by various theatre groups to celebrate the cause of women on, their women's experiences and shared thoughts. Whereas the workshops were being organize to train intended female actors the pros and cons of modern theatre, the festivals observed their contributions. IPTA worked as the first largest platform for the women to participate in theatre since 1943. "IPTA created actresses whose new societal and ideological commitments would create ultimately a new perception of the actress persona, a break with the domesticated personification" [Liu, Siyuan (ed); *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre; Routledge; New York; 2016*]. Dina Pathak, Shanta Gandhi, Gul Bardhan, Sova Sen, Geeta Sen, Reba Roychoudhury, Rekha Jain, Tripti Mitra, Preeti Banerjee, Chitra Sen were the stalwarts who travelled and performed extensively throughout the country with the Central Squad of the IPTA. Although, in fact, IPTA considered women's issues was only a part of a cluster of a range of social, economic, political and aesthetic problems.

In the subsequent phase number of ideologically committed Group Theatres and agencies hosting a plethora of theatre festivals, workshops celebrating the cause of women proliferated. To cite a few examples – *Akka* , the National Women's Theatre

Festival held in Mysore , 2001, National Women's Theatre Festival organized by *Yavanika*, a theatre group based in Hyderabad, National Workshop on Women, *Poorva* , Festival of Asian Women, 'Voicing Silence', Gendered Theatre by M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation organizes yearly festival and has held four interactive women's theatre festivals, called *Kulavai* or celebration, (*kulavai* is the Tamil name for the ululation sound made by women), *Samudaya* from Karnataka , *Kalashetra* from Manipur , Prithvi Theatre from Mumbai , *Alarippu* from Delhi (means blossoming, established in 1983), *Rangkarmee* from Kolkatta, *Rangayana* from Mysore and *Koothup-pattarai* from Chennai along with organizations/institutions such as the National School of Drama , the ICCR , *Natarang Pratisthan* regularly build up women centered theatrical productions and ideologically pledged drama to sought required social change to favour the cause of the women.

Acclaims towards this enthusiasm of women dramatists and directors in India is being regularly available in the major theatre journals like *Theatre India*, *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, *Rang Prasang*, *Bharat Rang*, *Natrang*, *Sahamat* etc. These journals come to celebrate special issues on feminist theatre incorporating criticisms, historical and theoretical discourses. Compilation and single author publications on women's theatre in India is also in vogue. Tutun Mukerjee has edited an anthology of women dramatists titled "*Staging Feminism: Plays by Women in Translation* (2005)" published by the Oxford Press; "*Body Blows: Women, Violence and Survival* (2000)" published by Seagull books; Lakshmi Subramanyam edited a volume on theatre criticism named "*Muffled Voices: Women in Modern Indian Theater* (2002)"; Amrita Singh edited another volume on feminist theatre in India titled "*Gender, Space and Resistance : Women and Theatre in india* (2013)"; A. Mangai published "*Acting Up: Gender and Theatre in India, 1979 Onwards* (2016)" to explores the presence and contribution of women to the recorded history of Indian theatre. Several other noteworthy research works and commentaries has been recorded in publications of noted theatre critics like: Aparna Dharwardkar, Maya Pandit, Vasudha Dalmia, Kirti Jain, Deepa Gehlot and many others.

In the context of modern Indian theatre, the women's theatre is largely concerned nowadays with social change and feminist ideology. There is a fundamental difference between Western feminist theatre with that of India's in agenda setting. While the feminist cultural politics and theatre in West, according to Susan Basnett, is based on demands like Equal Pay, Equal Education and Opportunities; Financial and Legal Independence; End to Discrimination Against Lesbians; Women's Right to Define Her Own Sexuality; and Freedom Against Violence [Mukherjee, Tutun; *Staging Resistance: Plays by Women in Translation*; Oxford University Press; New Delhi; 2005; p. 14], in India agenda of women's theatre is a critical mixture of protest against the traditional feudal barriers on women's free thought, expression, movement and relation like Female Foeticide, Khap (Rural Caste Court to validate or invalidate an inter-caste marriage), Dowry, Domestic Violence and In-Law Rapes etc. with far sophisticated urban individualized women's issues like Single Motherhood, Sexual Harassment at Workplace, Living single in separation etc., the conflict with age-old patriarchy, however, remains to built the bridge between both perspectives.

Further, in the West, contemporary feminist theory regards feminist theatre in a political context. As to Lizbeth Goodman, " Feminist theatre will be defined in a flexible way as that theatre which aims to achieve positive revaluation of women's roles and / or to effect social change, and which is informed in this project by broadly feminist ideas" [Subramanyam, Lakhmi (Ed.); *Muffled Voices: Women in Modern indian Theatre*; Har-Anand Publicatons Pvt Ltd; New Delhi; 2002; p. 21]. But, here in India, while a genuine feminist political wave is still awaited, the women-centric plays emphasize the despair and deprivation of women's survival in the patriarchal society, which is gradually appearing to be an attempt to stimulate such socio-political movement on feminist agenda. Women's theatre aspires at advancing consciousness to recuperate the social statures for women. It is fundamentally bothered with the prognosis of women's approach and is created by women with feminine concerns intended for amendments. Feminist theatre in India, as in abroad, examines the present realities, social norms and traditions that are

hostile to women. Its foremost intention is to facilitate desired transformations in women's lives through theatrical interpretations.

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