Afterword

The thesis is about how the interconnections between city and theatre are reflected in modern Indian drama/ theatre from the 1970s to the present. In the twentieth century, the overall success of theatre and the character of the city became entangled on many levels. The transformation of the world from rural to fast-changing urban societies has brought about significant changes in the way theatre is conceived, produced and performed. Thematically, theatre has, since its birth, been continuously preoccupied with the portrayal of lived spaces, behaviours, and environments of the city. It has long had a striking and distinctive capacity to capture and convey the spatial complexity, variety, and social dynamism of the city thorough its themes, acting and dramaturgy. In the course of the dissertation I have suggested that theatre in India from the 1970s onwards is predominantly an urban phenomenon. The city takes centre stage for playwrights (and directors) of the era. The different types of theatre undertaken for study might appear under familiar labels of Street theatre, Theatre of Roots, English Theatre, Women's Theatre; but viewed from the perspective of the city; they are all City Plays. They articulate urban *angst*, boost an urban revolution, map the power struggles within the city and in the process give voice to the voiceless. In doing so, they endeavour to bring the margins to the centre. Desmond Harding says in *Writing the City*, "the city is both a memory and an essential ground for modern life, and that when we read/watch urban theatre we not only recover a sense of collective urban history, but also perceive more clearly our own relationship with the cities in which we live by way of imagination. In other words, we remember or even foreshadow our own lives in symbolic ways that enrich our present existence."

The Urban Age is a story that reflects the transition of the world from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban one. But India has not yet completed this phase of transition. A complete transition seems unlikely in the near feature. India still has a vast majority of the rural population as the country has become rapidly urbanised and its post-independence megapolises are replete with all signs of consumerism and capitalist culture. Indeed, many of India's main cities have colonial origins, Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay being some of them. The decision to move the British capital to Delhi was made due to an unrest

triggered by growing nationalist consciousness. The post-colonial scenario saw disastrous population transfers that crowded both Delhi and Mumbai with refugees from across the border. India now has a cluster of cities, including Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and the new cities of Bangalore, Pune, and Ahmadabad are struggling to find a significant position for themselves. Even after independence the cities seem to be trapped in a colonial hangover, at once indulging and trying to break free from Western/ Colonial modes of life and art. Liberalization has resulted in a great change in the Indian society, especially in the urban middle class who negotiate their life in the cities and upcoming towns. Many of these include migrant communities from rural hinterlands. While some succeed in making their place in the city, others fade away into oblivion and darkness. A large scale revamp has been done in city infrastructure as cities sparkle with the glitter of shopping malls, amusement parks, multiplexes, advertisement hoardings, huge apartment complexes. On the flipside, most of this infrastructural development is devoid of systematic town planning and as a result new cities have sprung up from the heart of old cities. New Delhi and Old Delhi provide a perfect example of such unplanned development. The large scale migration to cities has subsequently put a pressure on its resources. The cit(y)zens of this 'new India' are at some level aware of and impatient with the problems in its cities: the traffic jams, the failures of infrastructure, the bureaucracy and red-tapism, the growing levels of pollution and the increasing rate of crime . It is ironical that the same new India cannot imagine its life outside these cities and can never think of going back to the rural origins. The government wants to turn India into a modern, economic powerhouse and, for this purpose, is making all sorts of capital expenditure in the cities. However, with so much of advancement to offer these cities are still sites of gross inequalities of economy, gender, class, religion and opportunity. Its streets witness jubilation and joy, revolution and rage -- and theatre in the city is nourished by these everyday urban realities. It is in the context of these conditions that surround cities in India (especially since the 1970s) that its theatre should be analysed. Indeed, interest in the relationship between city and theatre has been growing significantly as a result of the emergence of various thematic and formal representations of city in various fields such as urban studies, sociology, culture studies and performance studies, and hence this area was taken up for research. The core academic goal of this work has been to contribute to the study of the theatre and analyse its connection to the city. The

city is a site of possibility because it gives us a common ground to interact with others and develop new relationships, and structure our lives; and it is through these interactions, dialogues and differences that theatre nurtures itself and enlivens the stage. Therefore this work has tried to make visible this coalescence of culture, history and language in the act of reading and performing Indian plays that emerged in Indian cities from the 1970s to the present, taking into account its themes, dramaturgy, space, spectatorship and performance.

The thesis argues that that urban life has been an essential part of theatre in India, especially since the 1970s. It traces the trajectory of modern Indian drama written in English and translations from regional languages to Western-style realistic proscenium representations of myth and mythology and its subsequent incorporation of every aspect of urban spatiality, embracing within itself both the public and domestic realms. The kinds of theatre taken up for study in the four chapters of the dissertation were chosen for their ability to express the spatiality of the city. The Introduction gives a kind of outline of theatre history in India and traces the slow but steady entry of the city into theatre. In doing so it also sheds valuable light on the theoretical assumptions on the city and the idea of the city as told by philosophers down the ages. The Introduction problematizes the city and explains as to why the city has been chosen for study. Recent years have seen many new theoretical approaches to space and spatiality. Modern Indian Drama, when analysed from these perspectives of spatiality given by Soja, Lefebvre, Carlson, Harvie and Mumford, appears to be an urban-based enterprise, making it fit very well within this theoretical frame. It posits itself well into new spaces and enters into new areas of enquiry on language, location and theatre. Chapter 1 of the present dissertation throws open a new approach to the represented spatiality in Indian drama written in English. As far as Karnad is concerned, it is important to note that the playwright himself translated his earlier plays, originally written in Kannada, into English. But he switched to English as the language of original composition from the 1990s onwards. Most of his early plays are focused on Indian history and ancient Indian mythology and legend, and he contemporized them in light of present realities. In the new millennium, he transfers interest towards city-based themes, but his interest in folklore continues in plays and he becomes the pioneer of Roots' new canon theatre. *Yayati, Tughlaq, Nagamandala* and *Hayavadana*

employ folk conventions and combine them with contemporary issues relevant to urban audiences to constitute a hybrid genre, "urban-folk" drama. Karnad deeply realised that India was being increasingly urbanised, and an urban audience required the new canon. Innovation and experimentation were the main ideas in the roots movement which saw tradition and modernity in an inclusive way. Other playwrights in this genre include Vijay Tendulkar and Habib Tanvir.

        Chapter 2 focuses on the markedly urban tendencies of Protest theatre in India. In India a radical change was sparked-off by the anti-fascist movement of the Communist Party of India under the banner of Indian People's Theatre Association which called for a move away from proscenium theatres. The emergence of several forms of protest theatre in India such as street theatre, agit-prop theatre etc. was closely linked with the political theatre in Kolkata starting around the 1940s and showing marked leftist leanings. It emerged as a means for the lower classes to liberate themselves and intensify the revolution against the existing ruling classes. This kind of theatre which flourished in the hands of stalwarts such as Safdar Hashmi, Badal Sircar, Utpal Dutt was urban in terms of theme, location and dramaturgy. In fact study reveals that it actually arose as a response to the problems faced by the working classes who had migrated to the cities and faced extreme exploitation at the hands of capitalist mill-owners, corrupt politicians and the police. The most preferred location for such theatre was the street, the platform, the *nukkad* etc. However, one would naturally be tempted to ask, why? The answer to this question is multiple. One reason is that these locations offered greater viewership and anybody and everybody can watch a play performed by the theatre activists. The boundaries of class, caste and economic status seem to melt in them. It is a meeting place where all people share a common ground. Even people who cannot afford to pay for a stage ticket can watch a play and relate to it. Playwrights of this era come up with several themes through their revolutionary plays dealing with religion, class, poverty, and communalism. The most popular form of Protest theatre today is Street theatre which remains very popular till the day and survives in university and college troupes, NGOs who use it to create awareness on various issues. Street theatre therefore is a voice of the voiceless in the city.

The thesis also identifies the emergence of English, over the years, as the language of urban India. The scepticism which obstructed playwrights from writing plays in English even if they wanted to has to a great extent been eradicated. English language plays are no longer castigated as "un-Indian". Chapter 3 deals with plays written and performed originally in English. Indian English-language playwrights such as Mahesh Dattani, Abhishek Majumdar, Ramu Ramanathan are symptomatic of the radical turn in Indian theatre roughly around the 1980s. Shayoni Mitra notes, "But this now prolonged history of producing English plays at the university level has paid dividend by producing a fresh crop of mostly self-supported playwrights writing in English. Ramu Ramanathan, Rahul Da Cunha, Anuvab Pal, Ran Ganesh Kamatham, and Annie Zaidi, among others, have all had their works produced. This new generation seems once again to be enjoying the heteroglossia of open linguistic practices that one marked the cosmopolitanism of Parsi Theatre" (Mitra 89). This new group of writers is themselves city-bred in terms of their education, careers and background, and reflect the new urban India as it is. They explore the corpus of urban spatiality hitherto unexplored in urban theatre – both external and internal (psychic). Dattani explores spaces ranging from the shady areas of cities, as in Seven *Steps Around the Fire,* to public parks, coffee-shops and streets, as in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *30 Days in September* and *Final Solutions*, to the interiors of posh homes and offices as in *Tara*. He also addresses the issue of conventional gender role allocation, social conditioning and the gendering of urban spaces by the hegemonic discourse of patriarchal culture in plays such as *Dance Like a Man*. These playwrights counter the assumption that the city, being accommodative, fosters plurality and heterogeneity. In reality, however, urban life or the city deploys its own kind of hegemony and castigates anybody who does not follow its dictum, as an 'outsider'.

Indian Women playwrights writing in English -- such as Manjula Padmanavan, Poile Sengupta and Annie Zaidi -- continue to explore new theatrical strategies. This forms the crux of the discussion in Chapter 4. Indian women's theatre came to limelight with the Western feminism movement. These gender-based problems made it into the public agenda. The women's movement in India has highlighted many social problems, such as dowry deaths, female foeticide, sexual harassment, ignorance, illiteracy, gender inequality in families and society, etc. It has shown that women are capable of rational thought and are no less than

men. In the 1970s, the advent of urbanisation and industrialization produced jobs for women. This inspired emerging sensitive women writers of India to speak of several tabooed subjects. Women's revolution in India and socially responsible Indian theatre opened the way for voicing the female's concerns and their experiences of the city. The theatre of women became a catalyst for social change. Manjula Padmanavan's *Lights Out* (1986), which has been discussed in detail, is set in a drawing-dining area of a sixth floor apartment in a building in Bombay. The play boldly exposes the urban disease of voyeurism that shocks the urban viewer out of their   complacent sense of security and comfort. Today, women writers in urban centres of the country continue to write on critical topics such as sensuality, subjugation, alienation, migration, crisis of identity, sexuality etc. Contemporary female authors were often considered to be inferior to their male colleagues, their spectrum was limited and they usually restricted themselves to the portrayal of the experience of the confined domestic space. Despite the constraints, they have increased considerably the perception of the role of women in society. A female writer's depiction of female characters is often truthful and accurate. A male playwright's depiction of women and their problems appears to be a little uninspiring because he fails to consider the female psychology and viewpoint. Women playwrights have now produced plays that criticise the institution of marriage and family hierarchy, after successfully establishing themselves as incredibly talented artists. They have written/performed plays that tear down the unjust cultural boundaries with powerful, nuanced female characters. Women now do not need men to be their mouthpiece. They have taken it upon themselves to have a *voice* of their own and speak out to the world through their plays. In many cases they have not been able to find exact solutions to their problems, but they have at least registered a protest. Women playwrights have come out with issues such as domestic violence, rape, sexual abuse, female sexuality, and the problems of being a working woman and a homemaker simultaneously. The innovation has been not only in terms of theme but also dramaturgy. Women directors have worked without traditional scripts; actors have acted *impromptu* on stage, used single actors, portrayed the female body as a metaphor for their fragmented life. Playwrights such as Manjula Padmanabhan, Poile Sengupta, Mallika Thaneja, Annie Zaidi have signaled this welcome change through their work.

Thus the theatre genres and playwrights undertaken for study constitute "a poetics of urban modernism in which the rhetoric of the metropolis is transformed into a *Weltstadt*: a topos of the imagination where the city becomes the world" (Shiel and Fitzmaurice 5). This in turn becomes an essential idea on which theatre thrives. As a cultural sign, the city is the essential ground of modern existence, of modern life as urban life, and modern consciousness as urban consciousness. Thus when we read urban play-texts or watch performances we not only recover a sense of collective urban history, but also perceive more clearly our own relationship with the cities in which we live by way of imagination. In other words, we remember our own lives in symbolic ways that enrich our lives in the present. Representations of cities are not simply portraits of the present or past consigned to museums of the literary imagination. This thesis therefore has not only focussed on theatre alone, or city alone, but on the relationship or conjunction between the two as it has played out in a wide range of geographical and historical contexts and, particularly, as it may help us to comprehend and respond to large social and cultural processes such as globalization, liberalisation and socio-political changes . The thesis as broken up into four parts maps the development of theatre subgenres and their urbanity, continuities and discontinuities vis-a-vis the city. It analyses the representational strategies that were used by playwrights and directors to capture the fragmentation and opacity of the cities. It is therefore a detailed study of the postindependence city and its theatre in the context of late capitalism, migration, globalization, and postmodern culture, and the challenges these pose to our times.