"City Plays": A Study of Urban Theatre in India since the 1970s

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled "'City Plays': A Study of Urban Theatre in India since the [illegible]" has been prepared by me under the guidance of Dr. Ashis Sengupta, Professor in the [illegible] of English, University of North Bengal. No part of this thesis has formed the [illegible] for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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Abstract

Recent times have seen an upsurge in academic and scholarly interest in the interconnections between the city, theatre and other performative practices. Intrigued by this emerging area in research, the thesis investigates, and takes a critical view of, the nature and context of theatre and performance in an urban environment -- of Indian plays, in our case, written and performed in cities from the 1970s to the present. As a researcher, my constant aim has been to see how one might use an understanding of theatre in the city to arrive at social experiences of urban living and also analyze the transformative role of theatre in terms of these experiences. The thesis thus focuses on the multiplicity of meanings generated by the city and performed in Indian theatre during the period mentioned above. My focus in the course of the work will be to engage with theatre in its urban context – with its interface with the cit(y)zens, and analyze its themes, material and dramaturgy.

What gives a city its own character? What is it that gives a place its identity? On the surface, city spaces appear to be delimited by traffic patterns and signboards, utilities, and demarcated neighbourhoods. But, as a researcher, I am interested in looking at the kinds of ordinary encounters that give these spaces a personality, an identity that makes it a ‘place’. The city's environment is made up of residents' ambitions, dreams, frustrations, and suffering; it is a kind of receptacle, packed with human experience. Not only in terms of demographics, economics, or architecture, but also in terms of sentiment and emotion, the city is a meeting ground of people from different walks of life who share the contested space of the city. Cities thus become more than their built environment, more than a set of class or economic relationships; they become a lived, suffered, and felt experience constantly evolving.

Theatre being a cultural product informed by the historical, political and social conditions of a time is not only representative of these realities but also formative of the nature of such cities. The city is a stage that produces identities and is in turn produced by them. The thesis adopts performance studies as a tool to examine the ways in which the drama of living unfolds itself in the cities. The citizens are participants as well as audiences of urban theatre. Hence it becomes important to refract the city not only though the lens of performance as stabilized practice but through the dynamics of performativity. Performative theatre

practices encourage increased audience participation and compel them to question their own performance in everyday urban life. The performative critical approach empowers the citizens and gives them a sort of agency to question the normative and hegemonic social, political practices of the society. It also reinforces the fact that the staged drama is after all a reflection of the drama of their life. Urban theorists such as Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, Victor Turner have all reinforced this view in their works.

Chapters have been organized chronologically, thematically and dramaturgically at once. Each chapter seeks to offer critical insights into a particular phase of city-theatre in India and establish its right to claim as a separate (sub) genre. Chapter 1explains how the "Theatre of Roots" movement adopted folk conventions and practices in theatre to relate urban experience. Chapter 2 revisits protest theatre in India and looks into its connections with the city. The chapter investigates the connection between the development of disturbing social and political conditions in the country during the 1970s and the emergence of this theatre of protest, particularly in the country's urban and semi-urban areas. Chapter 3 focuses on English-language plays and brings out the experiences of the 'new' urban Indian landscape. Women playwrights are examined in Chapter 4, which demonstrates how women from the intellectual and professional elite class, as well as from marginalized or underprivileged groups, manage their living spaces and negotiate their urban lives respectively. The thesis thus draws attention to the multidimensional experience generated by the interaction between the city and its inhabitants, and theatricalized on stage and in open spaces in different performance formats.

Thus, the subject of the thesis is both old and new. Old because a lot of work has been done on theatre and also on the city, but few of them have approached the synergy of theatre and urbanism, especially on the Indian stage, which this work attempts. Books such as Aparna Dharwadkar's *Theatres of Independence: Drama Theory and Urban Performance in India since 1947* (2005) deal with 'the new dramatic canon' especially after 1950, and the different ways and processes involved in the act of writing, producing and circulating plays in a multilingual national culture. Nandi Bhatia's *Modern Indian Theatre: a Reader* (2009) is a historical take on the influence of socio-political practices on theatre and theatre's formal evolution as a result of this interaction. Vasudha Dalmia's *Poetics, Plays and Performances* (2006) focuses on the urban encounter with folk theatre forms, with their politicization on stage between the 1940s and

1970s. It primarily deals with the politics of modern Indian theatre vis-a-vis the cultural policy of the government. Though each of the above books is comprehensive and a scholarly piece in its own focal area, none of them deal with this new category of plays that can be called 'city plays' in different senses. Also to be noted is the fact that none of them include any criticism of the English-language plays written and performed after the 1980s. Dharwadkar's exclusion of contemporary women playwrights has been counterbalanced to some extent by Tutun Mukherjee's *Staging Resistance: Plays by Women in Translation* (2005). However, as the title suggests, its focus is on the translation of play texts and not theatre study as such. The only book that comes close to acknowledging this genre called 'city plays' is the Mahesh Dattani introduced play anthology, *City Plays*(2004). This, I should say, is also an inspiration behind choosing the topic for my thesis; but again, it is no theatre criticism. Similarly, there have been many scholarly books on the city -- such as Jen Harvie's *Theatre and the City* (2009), Desmond Harding's *Writing the City: Urban Visions and Literary Modernisms* (2003), and Robert Park's *The City* (2019). Each of them is an authoritative work on the city, but again none of them read urbanism in the context of theatre as an aesthetic practice. The present study should fill up a visible gap in Indian theatre criticism by placing theatre within the frames of the 'urban' in its many iterations.

Preface

The basic idea for this research grew out of my interest in theatre and also in the rapid transformation of the world into urban clusters. As the world has already moved into an Urban Age, theatre as an art form very closely related to life is bound to absorb and in turn reflect these transitions on its stage. As the cit(y)zens negotiate their lives in cities, a similar drama of living unfolds on the stage. The main focus of this dissertation is on the city as viewed through the eyes of theatre practitioners and performers as well as of their characters, with an aim to provide a complex perspective on the struggles, possibilities, anxieties, and disappointments of city life. In doing so the work does not overlook the existing body of research on the city as also on theatre, but uses it to bring out the multi-layered interaction between city and theatre. The term 'city theatre' is more indicative of this relationship than of a uniform performance genre. The thesis probes the variety of themes and forms that emerge out of theatre's changing interface with the evolving character of Indian city between the 1970s and the present.

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CONTENTS

Introduction

*"*To make a novel out of a city, to represent the streets and the various districts as *dramatis personae,* each one with a character in conflict with every other; to give life to human figures and situations as if they were spontaneous growths from the cobblestones of the streets […] to work in such a way that at every changing moment the true protagonist was the living city, its biological continuity, the monster that was Paris—this is what Balzac felt impelled to do when he began to write *Ferragus*." ~ Italo Calvino*, The City as Protagonist in Balzac.*

Our being is not separate from our situatedness. Our location, the way we anchor ourselves, the way we interact with ourselves, the way we interact with others, constitutes our identity. Our identity is always already influenced by our *habitus*. This *habitus* helps in identity formation and meaning generation. Hence are asked the questions so vital to our identity – when and where? Since our spatiality is always already a part of our being, we have made places out of spaces; just as we have made watches out of time. Tuan says, "Place is a term which signifies a territorial space – it can be seen and physically inhabited. It is open to architectural and land planning (as in town planning) and is, therefore, a concept having a very concrete reality. The term "space" on the other hand, signifies an abstract concept which is basically discursive in nature. It is associated with how people of different cultures divide up their world, assign values to its parts, and measure them, according to their biological needs and social relations. "Space" thus, in discursive terms, is "humanly constructed space" and the human being, by his mere presence, "imposes a schema on space" This is how the city, by virtue of human action, becomes "space," and not just "place" signifying a latitudinal and longitudinal point of intersection" (Tuan 34). In the course of the thesis I shall consider this 'where' co-ordinate of our identity. Where do we live? We live either in cities or in towns or in villages. The question is what makes a town different from a city? A village different from a town? More importantly, are all cities alike? It is quite clear that New York is not London, that London is not Delhi, that Paris is not Berlin. Then why this tendency to homogenize the heterogeneous space of the city? What is it then, that makes a city? Is it its buildings, roads, shopping malls, hospitals that make a city? Or is it the people who live in it? The vital question to be asked is, does a city define a set of social, cultural practices that go on in it

or is it itself defined by it? Our lives as citizens are shaped by our responses to several issues. How do we cultivate positive, cohesive societies which value diversity and also promote the same? Should the concept of beauty guide our urban planning and architecture? How do we achieve fairness in our cities? Such issues are of vital importance when one thinks of life in a city, but in most public policy debates they have always ended up staying as unexamined assumptions.

In this thesis I attempt to study the city in relation to theatre. Chicago School member, Robert Park, was of the opinion that the city could not be defined only on the basis of its physical or institutional forms. He called the city "a state of mind", "The city is a state of mind, a body of customs and traditions, and of organized attitudes and sentiments that inhere in this tradition. The city is not, in other words, merely a physical mechanism and an artificial construction. It is involved in the vital processes of the people who compose it; it is a product of nature and particularly of human nature." (Harvie 2)

It is because of the ambiguous yet interesting questions that the city has left unanswered that it has been an area of study for philosophers down the ages. Several prominent thinkers have referred to the city in their search for a base of moral ethics and democratic philosophy. Others also extended place and environment ideologies to specifically concentrate on the city, integrating cultural, sociopolitical, and ecological issues. Present intellectual studies on human existence and the construction of identity also give much importance to the city. Proponents of globalization also see the "global city" gradually as a modern locus for both sociopolitical and economic issues. Socrates initiated the birth of Western philosophy in the city. With the switch over from the remote village to the ancient *polis* of Athens, thinkers like Socrates posed questions about the very nature of this new society and lifestyle mechanism and so founded by it. "For Socrates, the unexamined life- a life without philosophy – was not worth living. And the life of philosophy was nurtured within the walls of the city" (Meagher 3). Henri Lefebvre states that in "Classical philosophy from Plato to Hegel, the city was much more than a secondary theme, an object among others. The links between philosophical thought and urban life appear clearly upon reflection, although they need to be made explicit" (Lefevbre 86). In his *Republic*, in a conversation between Socrates and other Athenian men, Plato establishes a city "in speech"; for him justice of the individual in the context of the city is important. The

city, for Aristotle, is marked by its ultimate goal of common good which he defines as justice. Pericles especially praised the tolerance of Athens, its ability to accept non-citizens. Aristotle compares the cities to a living entity, a collective structure in which the whole exceeds the sum total of its component parts. The city's shared intention is to establish and encourage *eudaimonia,* better interpreted as "human flourishing." St. Augustine in his musings on the city brings about a combination of Christianity and the classical ideals of ancient Greek philosophy. Guided by Plato's insistence on the value of 'truthful definitions', Augustine claims that Rome may not have been a city at all, as it did not follow Cicero's definitional standards. Augustine believes that Rome was not successful in satisfying Cicero's definition of a republic as a "people's affair" because there was no common consensus on what is right. Augustine believed that the common good that has gone astray on earth could only be re-instated in a heavenly city. While both the Greeks and St. Augustine gave importance to what is good, just and true in the city, the only concern for Machiavelli is power. Machiavelli does not hesitate to exploit the prince's skill (*virtu*) to take absolute control over the city. For him, if a city or its cit(y)zens refuse to fall in place with the prince, then it has to be destroyed, rather than let it destroy his success. Machiavelli mentions two types of cities, the free city where citizens revolt against the prince and live by their own free laws and the city that lives a life that is subservient to its ruler. Machiavelli prefers the second one. St. Thomas More a British contemporary of Machiavelli created *Utopia*. More's ideal representation of humans is as naturally social and supportive beings. He is so totally focused on the need for shared values and ties that he utterly excludes diversity from his community/city. Machiavelli's insistence on individualism and '*realpolitik'* resurface in Thomas Hobbes, who is intrigued by questions of survival. During Hobbes's time the development of the nation-state gains ground and the concept of city as a political entity takes a backseat. The accelerated urbanization that occurred in the nineteenth century as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution brought the city a into the arena of social science research and it ceased to be only a subject of philosophical inquiry. George Simmel and Max Weber raised valuable questions like "What is a City?" and investigated the changing nature of city over time. Meagher says, "In the twentieth century, philosophers who worked on the urban questions largely focused on the rapid growth of the cities and the rise of the mass man, which they saw as a distinguishing characteristic of the modern city. Some like Mumford, returned to Athenian concepts of

community for the antidote to the increasing anonymity of big cities. Others theorized that the growth of negative urban traits was linked to the rise of capitalism and turned to Marx for analysis. In more recent years, we have witnessed yet another shift in philosophy's relationship to the city. Although earlier philosophers focused on issues concerning the nature of the city and concepts of citizenship, more recent writings tend to focus on the built environment and on issues of diversity and economic justice." (Meagher 7)

The present study attempts an understanding of theatre in and around the city, analyze and demonstrate how and why the theatre relates to the urban community and vice versa. The city has become, and continues to be, a significant centre where human civilisation sublimates its joys, crisis and discontent. As such, towns and cities concentrate and reflect on all the main intellectual issues to which thinkers return eternally and these ripples in the city are caught by the mirror of theatre and art. Lewis Mumford, one of the pioneers of the twentieth century urban planners, understood the city as "a theatre of social action": He says, "The city fosters art and is art; the city creates the theatre and is the theatre. It is in the city, the city as theatre, that man's more purposive activities are focused. The physical organization of the city may ... through the deliberate efforts of art, politics, and education, make the drama more richly significant, as a stage-set, well-designed, intensifies and underlines the gestures of the actors and the action of the play" (Mumford 82).

Mumford also says that urban performativity, then, allows citizens to explore – through imagination, memory and longing – new ideas about themselves and their inter-connection with the urban landscape. Theatre forms an integral part of performance studies, holding within itself a vast storehouse of human culture. Also, theatre as an art form best demonstrates life. Theatre catches the ripples of life and reflects them on the stage. Not only does it image reality but also produces new realities by its story-telling, acting and dramaturgy – both on and off the proscenium stage. Jen Harvie says in *Theatre and the City*,

> Theatre, likewise, is an ever-changing material, aesthetic and social structure where many people gather to participate – through work and leisure - in complex social activities; it is also usually located in cities. Theatre is therefore in some ways symptomatic of the urban process, demonstrating the structures, social power

> dynamics, politics and economics at work more broadly throughout the city. Theatre actually does more than demonstrate urban process, therefore; theatre is a part of urban process, producing urban experience and thereby producing the city itself (Harvie 6).

As stated earlier, the thesis attempts to map the lived experience of the city through theatre, in this case city theatre in India roughly around the 1970s to the present. But the question automatically arises, why city? The answer to this is the age we live in. Whether by chance or choice we live in an Urban Age which is experiencing a rapid transformation from rural to urban. In 1968, the world faced a kind of Urban riot, and almost as a spontaneous reaction to this, academics shifted their focus to social issues in these towns and cities. Although an overlooked area for a long time, several universities started programs in Urban Studies. At present several educational institutions and universities also include urban outreach centers which link academics and members of the urban community. Such outreach projects are clearly indicative of a scholarly engagement with cities and the need for community participation. In India too, the post-independence adoption of a mixed economy has ensured this trend of urbanization. Despite having a large rural population, there is a huge inflow of people into the cities of Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Bangalore. The population of urban areas in India is rising at a rapid rate. Already grappling with issues of colonial hangover and religio-ethnic diversity, this spate of urbanization and industrialization makes urban India a volatile battleground for survival. The present day theatre feeding on such issues portrays an urban landscape which accentuates the isolation of individuals rather than promoting a sense of community. Hence, the focus given to the city and its theatre and the multiplicity of meanings it generates.

The present dissertation will explore the relationship of theatre in India (in regional languages and translation from the 1970s to the present) with the city. It will investigate into the "reality/realities" of these cities that make them muse-worthy in the course of four chapters which have been organised chronologically, thematically and dramaturgically at once. Each chapter seeks to offer critical insights into a particular phase of city-theatre in India and establish its right to claim as a separate (sub)genre. It will take up select plays of GirishKarnad, Habib Tanvir and Vijay Tendulkar in chapter1 which interrogates the city's

link to folk performance and the emergence of the new dramatic form of urban-folk. Moving forward the chapter 2 demonstrates the theatrical and performative dimensions of cities most easily recognizable in plays and other designated performance events including street-theatre, the agit-prop theatres associated with rallies and demonstrations, festivals, site-specific works and theatre's social role as seen in the street theatre movement that flourished in the hands of Safdar Hashmi, Badal Sircar and Utpal Dutta. Chapter 3 focuses on the Indian English playwrights who chose English as the medium of their plays and the city as the centre of their drama. This list includes the likes of Mahesh Dattani, Abhishek Majumdar and Ramu Ramanathnan who bring the city to life through their plays. These plays may be studied as conscious explorations into the relationship between the city and the contemporary theatre in India. These plays have been read as potent texts that capture the urban milieu through an exploration of spaces that have indelible footprints on the city. Chapter 4 deals specifically with women's experience of the city and how women playwrights represent the city though their work.

The city chosen for this project is "essentially" the Indian city. India is a strange mix of traditional cultures and modernity. It is an older civilization and a comparatively younger nation-state. Unlike the growth of western civilization, as discussed earlier, historically centered around or largely co-incident with the development of cities like Rome and Greece, present day Indian cities are mostly post-independence products of urbanization brought in by industrialization and globalization. Therefore to define the Indian city in parlance with western traditions of the 'polis' would be grossly inappropriate. Unlike the western city which becomes a 'salad-bowl'[1] for people of different walks of life, the Indian city with its vast religious, economic and socio-political diversity forms a kind of mosaic rather than a uniform community. The Indian city is where the "imagined communities"[2] live as immigrant communities[3]. A large number of people

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[1] A salad bowl or tossed salad is a metaphor for the way a multicultural society can integrate different cultures while maintaining their separate identities.

[2] Concept defined by Benedict Anderson in his book of the same name.

migrating from the villages to the city in search of jobs or otherwise form a huge internal diaspora within itself. This produces a sort of hybridity where the migrant is unable to shed the regional baggage and this in turn results in the opacity and fragmented nature of the city. Despite being in a so-called homogenous space, they are heterogeneous. They struggle within themselves as they amalgamate, not assimilate in the city. Theatre being a cultural product informed by the historical, political, social conditions of a time is not only representative of these realities but also formative of the nature of such cities.

A city is a conglomeration of strangers who perform their lives in the city. The city is a stage that produces identities and is in turn produced by them. The thesis adopts performance studies as a tool to examine the ways in which the drama of living unfolds itself in the cities. The citizens are participants as well as audience of urban drama. Hence it becomes important to refract the city not only though the lens of performance but through the referent of performativity. Performative theatre practices encourage increased audience participation and compel them to question their own performance in everyday urban life. The performative critical approach empowers the citizens and gives them a sort of agency to question the normative and hegemonic social, political practices of the society. It also reinforces the fact that the staged drama is after all a reflection of the drama of their life. Urban theorists such as Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, Victor Turner have all reinforced this view in their works. Victor Turner talks of 'social drama'. He believes that dramas exist because of the conflict that is inherent in societies. As Turner says,

> The manifest social drama feeds into the *latent* realm of stage drama; its characteristic form in a given culture, at a given time and place, unconsciously or perhaps pre-consciously, influence not only the form but also the content of the stage drama of which it is the active or "magic" mirror. The stage drama, when it is meant to do more than entertain-though entertainment is always one of its vital aims-is a meta commentary, explicit or implicit, witting or unwitting, on the major social dramas of its social context (wars, revolutions,

[3] The word immigrant here refers largely to Indian citizens who migrate from the villages to the cities or small towns to bigger metropolitan cities in search of jobs and other sources of employment.

> scandals, institutional changes). Not only that, but its message and rhetoric feedback into the *latent* processual structure of the social drama and partly accounts for its ready ritualization. Life itself now becomes a mirror held up to art, and the living now *perform* their lives, for the protagonists of a social drama, 'a drama of living (Turner 20).

Henri Lefebvre, the radical French sociologist talks of the citizens 'right to the city', of their ability to change themselves by changing the city. Performance orientated theatres, such as street theatres, urban artist's march, have this aim in view when they perform in the cities. In a nutshell, the narratives of theatre are those that define their relation to the places they live in. Theatre brings out the hopes, desires, disappointments and attitudes of the audience and in doing so often blurs the distinctions between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic realm. Therefore, a perception of theatre in the city can help us to appreciate the social experience in it. Nicholas Why brow writes in *Performance and the Contemporary City*, "the body has not been replaced at all but *re-placed*, wandering en masse into the space of the city (not for the first time of course), performing *in situ,* a relational body or switching station that acts within and is acted upon by its urban surroundings. Thus bodies can be said to both *produce* and *be produced* by the city. And while cities obviously contain bodies, bodies also contain cities" (Whybrow 3).

The performance traditions in India trace back to the epics and *puranas* as well as traditions of oral story-telling and regional folk-narratives. However, with the coming of the British large theatre Halls were built in the colonial city of Kolkata, which catered to the urban educated middle-class. These colonial mediations made theatre more and more city-centric and ironically enough, colonial methods were largely used to materialize the anti-colonial cultural narrative in India. The partnership between the city and the theatre reached new heights when theatre – and particularly English theatre – became the vehicle through which the native's induction into the cultural modes of the West was accomplished. The location for such assimilation became the city, whose geographical realities facilitated the spread of colonial culture. Throughout the nineteenth century, the colonial authorities did not pursue repressive tactics surrounding the dissemination of English theatre throughout India. They refrained from using oppressive contraptions such as the laws or force that compel citizens to behave in compliance with societal norms; they rather thought it

convenient to culturally hegemonies the urban elite. They selected ideology as a means to fulfill this propaganda. Throughout colonial India, the hegemonic practice of English theatre, based on Western concepts of realism appeared perfectly natural. The city was the focus of such activity. Throughout the early nineteenth century there was a period when theatre-going became commercialized in India, with theatre being a luxury for use by a single segment in society including the learned elite. Theatre progressed into a consumer goods from a community event associated with annual harvests and religious occasions. The British established the conceptual model of theatre as "dramatic literature" in India and brought in the textualisation of drama as opposed to the native indigenous traditions. Erin B. Mee says: “Modern theatre came to be defined in terms of plot-driven plays that stemmed from a single author. It was expected to have human characters, conversational dialogue, behavior that was psychologically motivated, events that were causally linked, and realistic settings that allowed spectators to believe in the present-tense reality of the action onstage and to identify with the characters, eliminating anything that would shatter the illusion of the fictional world of the play” (Mee 2).

This urban turn in Indian theatre became more and more evident in post-independence India. Efforts at nation building largely paralleled the development of the Nehruvian megapolises of Delhi, Bombay Madras and Calcutta. Around the same time efforts were also directed at the institutionalization of culture, and theatre formed an important part of this institutionalization. Major milestones were the formation of the Sangeet Natak Academy (1952) and the National School of Drama (1959) which organized several seminars and conferences aimed at finding a single idiom for Indian Theatre. But, given the plurality and multifaceted nature of India any such efforts were only frustrated. Various genres and sub-genres of theatre emerged during this time, largely mirroring contextual realities.

The need to develop a theatre that moved away from British models and at the same time reflected the contemporary realties of the day, concretized in the ‘theatre of the roots’[4] movement. It combined “ specific traditional Indian performance practices with Western theatrical conventions to create modern plays for urban audiences ” (Mee 26). In certain cases, this theatrical mode also used material from village

[4] Term coined by Suresh Awashthi to denote the trend of actively using traditional genres in contemporary theatrical productions.

life and presented it to city audiences which made the reception context of this material very different from a village. Director M.K.Raina wrote, "we are not going back to tradition, as some of us claim, we are in the process of creating, thinking new sensibilities, and therefore new forms. Perhaps the fusion of some of the traditional forms and contemporary struggles may give birth to vital new forms, representative of contemporary Indian reality" (Raina 29). Moving beyond binaries, this theatre in its very essence questioned the "the colonial cultural divide between high/English/urban/modern/theatre and what was characterized as low/Indian/rural/traditional/ performance" (Mee 4). This type of theatre we can call urban-folk drama, for it incorporated folk traditions and visual practices into its corpus, but the message it sought to convey was contemporary, portraying the *angst* of the urban generation. The folk traditions served the purpose of taking theatre to the level of spectacle and hence conveying the message more effectively. Writers such as Habib Tanvir, Girish Karnad and Vijay Tendulkar are instrumental in analysing this phase of city-theatre in India.

The 1970's was a time of upheaval for several reasons. The adoption of mixed economic policy, the rapid spate of industrialization which drew in large number of people from villages to the cities, the Naxalite Movement, the Autonomous Women's movement, refugee influx from Bangladesh, and several wars brought in drastic changes to the social, economic and political order. Such changes readily caught the attention of playwrights of the naturalist-realist mode who did not hesitate to make theatre a weapon of protest against social and economic exploitation and inequities. The unrest of the 1970s, the People's Revolution with strong Marxist inclinations, produced among other things, a theatre of protest in the urban and semi-urban areas of the country. Urban, educated intellectuals such as Badal Sircar, Safdar Hashmi and Utpal Dutt spearheaded this movement. This theatre broke several conventions. Keeping up to its revolutionary name, it moved out of the proscenium, into the streets, *nukkads*, factories, slums, temple-courtyards, railway platforms etc in its attempt to reach out to the public at large. In most cases this audience comprised factory workers, unemployed youth, labourers who had migrated to the city in search of jobs. But life in the city had not been very kind. Marvin Carlson said in *Places of Performance,* "places of performance generate social and cultural meanings of their own which in turn help to structure the meaning of the entire theatrical experience" (Carlson 2).In a nutshell, street theatre had this aim in view when it moved to these alternative venues and out to the streets of the city.

Since the 1980s onwards a group of young, dynamic, city-bred playwrights have enlivened the urban stage by portraying new cityscapes and by using English as their medium of playwriting. Bold, new and fresh in its approach, theme and dramaturgy, this theatre smells of the city. Dealing with contextual realities, contemporary Indian English theatre is concerned with city-dwellers who are busy negotiating their lives in the city and facing new challenges every day. The rate of social development in India has not been able to keep up with the rate of mechanical urbanization, leading to huge gap between the rich and the poor. Urban India has become a place where the dictum 'survival of the fittest' applies aptly. It has become a mad race for capturing a 'rightful place' in the city claimed mostly by wrongful means. Violence, suicide, murder, communal strife, rape, abuse have become tools of subjugating the marginalized sections of the city. The same power politics runs internally within urban households for getting a larger share of the limited amenities and resources the members possess. Indian English theatre today has become a site of reenactment of the complicated dynamics of city-life. Mahesh Dattani, Abhishek Majumdar, Ramu Ramanathan portray these urban conflicts using an English which is assertive, urban and hybrid. Dattani himself says that there are enough issues and challenges in urban Indian society and these automatically form the content of his work. Theatre groups such as Rage Theatre and MAD (Mad About Drama) are performing plays which are a depiction of the populace of the metropolitan cities in their confusions and conflicts both within and without. The discourses that are produced as the characters speak to each other and to the audience are essentially the discourses that run in the cities.

Geographer Nancy Duncan reminds us, "Social relations, including, importantly, gender relations, are constructed and negotiated spatially and are embedded in the spatial organization of places" (Duncan 5). After all its claims of development and progress, one thing that the so called liberated space of the city has not been able to avoid is gender bias. Women from across disciplines, caste and class have been subjected to some kind of discrimination and gender bias. What differs is the nature and degree of discrimination; the attitude remains the same – men have 'mind', women have 'body'. Women's experience of the city is rather different from men's. It is then obvious that their literature will also be different. Anne Lambright and Elizabeth Guerrero write in the introduction to their book *Unfolding the City*, "women's experience of the city, as expressed particularly through literature, is unique and revealing, as women writers propose new

mappings of urban space; contemplate the rapid transformation of the modern city; interpret caste, ethnic and class dynamics; and explore their own place in the city" (Lambright and Guerra xiii). The work of women playwrights (from 1970s to the present) and how women have responded and reacted to the urban milieu will also come within the scope of the thesis. Ashis Sengupta says in his book, *Mapping South Asia Through Contemporary Theatre*, "Playwriting and directing remained a male privilege until the emergence during the 1970s of the autonomous women's movement (mainly around issues of dowry, rape, and bride burning), largely spearheaded by urban, middle-class, educated women). In recent times the focus has shifted from the previous concerns of 'women's welfare' to the 'women's empowerment' and the question of individual autonomy" (Sengupta 22). 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 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, and portrayed the female body as a metaphor for their fragmented life. Playwrights such as Neelam Mansingh Chowdhury , Anuradha Kapoor, Manjula Padmanabhan, Poile Sengupta, Mallika Thaneja, Annie Zaidi have signaled this welcome change through their work. To add on to these are a host of ambitious young performers such as Maya Krishna Rao, Jyoti Dogra or Amruta Mapuskar who, rather than using preconceived scripts, perform on stage using motion, gestures and improvised texts.

Writing in the 1930s, Lewis Mumford interpreted the city as a "theatre of collective action". Within confines of the contemporary post-industrial urbanization, where theatricality and performativity are core generators of "experience economies", Mumford's ideas retain its relevance. When shaping reform, city policy-makers become constantly attuned to such dramatic conceptions as the "urban scene" and "urban drama". This study, by employing interpretive approaches facilitated by Performance Studies, offers an account of some of the forms in which theatre and performance happen in cities. This addresses some of the ramifications of urban performativity, suggesting that successful urban communities include

performative ethics, "whereby citizens become spectators and co-performers of urban drama". It has rightly been said that, “Performing the city, therefore, demands an ethics of performance, a measure by which to foster and value partnerships between the polis and its people. In order for the performative to be embedded and activated beyond the formal theatre building, the citizenry needs access to shared civic space. Performing the city becomes an assertion then of the political values of access, participation and cultural democracy” (Makhem 158). The thesis thus proposes to focus on the multiplicity of meanings generated by the city and performed in Indian theatre from the 1970s to the present. As Desmond Harding says, “In linguistic terms, urban fiction thus represents a hospitable field of play, a paradigm of *difference,* of linguistic free play, defying unity, wholeness and authority invested in a unified subject” (Harding 9). My focus in the course of the work will be to engage with theatre in its urban context and analyze its themes, material and dramaturgy – with its interface with the cit(y)zens Nevertheless, the city's theatre comes alive by individuals' collective actions, generating signs and meanings, in conversation and conflict with each other, watching and being watched, narrating tales, enacting the rituals of drama. By doing so, people are actively involved in a theatre of collective change as co-performers as well as viewers. In order for this theatre to operate effectively in reality instead of being reduced to the level of a fictitious allegory, the city government must accept the performance in its entirety, including the dramas of violation and antagonism that empower social discourses, and allow the existence of harmonious diversities.

Chapter 1

A Rhetoric of Contrasts: A Study of the 'Theatre of Roots'[1]

After Independence in 1947, Indian theatre practitioners returned to their 'roots' in their efforts to construct an "Indian" theatre that would be aesthetically different from the Westernized theatre developed during the colonial era and prevalent in urban areas at the time. The Theatre of Roots was the first deliberate attempt, as this movement was called, to establish a body of work for urban audiences that fused modern European theatre with traditional Indian performance while preserving its difference from both. Classical dance, religious ritual, martial arts, traditional entertainment and Sanskrit aesthetic theory were incorporated with contemporary realities of the modern day and performed for urban audiences. Suresh Awasthi who is also the proponent of this term said, "I am taking the risk of giving a label – theatre of roots - to the unconventional theatre which has been evolving for some two decades in India as a result of modern theater's encounter with tradition." (Awasthi 48) By addressing the politics of artistic representation, and by challenging the visual practices, performer/spectator relationships, dramaturgical structures and aesthetic goals of colonial performance, the movement offered a tool for reassessing colonial ideology and culture and for articulating and defining a newly emerging "India". One of the many things that it sought to do was to break the dichotomy between traditional and modern worlds, the classical and the folk, the rural and the urban. In this new theatrical experiment folk narratives and dramatic forms were fused with contemporary issues, issues mostly relating to the urban middleclass of the day. Hence we can also call it urban folk' drama. Vasudha Dalmia says, "Folk theatre was now being drained as a source of vitality for the urban stage. These plays fuse folk/traditional mythological and ritual material and forms with contemporary language in a conscious attempt to draw on traditional dynamics in contemporary context; the issues they address are highly relevant in contemporary India, but the narrative derives from traditional tales and epics and the performance include folk modes e.g. song, dance and comic repartee" (Dalmia 228) .Playwrights and

[1] Term coined by Suresh Awasthi to denote a new hybrid theatre in India.

directors such as Habib Tanvir, Girish Karnad and Vijay Tendulkar drew upon traditional forms, making their theatre at the same time relevant to contemporary urban, social and political issues.

The two irreconcilably different "theatrical forms that these playwrights had been confronted with, evolves out of the tensions between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past" (Karnad 1). In terms of a cultural conflict between the pre-modern traditional history of myth and legend, and the urban colonial narrative of modernity, the clash between the two is easily perceivable. Also, what we term "modern" India was not urbanized miraculously or suddenly; instead, the dichotomy between the rural and the urban was ideologically manufactured as a dichotomy between a dark ancient past and an enlightened modern past. This was the paradox of the contemporary Indian dramatist who was presented with a problematic choice in the matter of theatrical practice, and eventually chose hybridized modes of performance suited specifically to the tastes of city audiences.

In the structure of India's cultural space, which goes back to a pre-historic past, rich in its treasured glories and richer than the so-called Euro-centric hegemonic representation of culture, the modern Indian city, conceived afresh, thus evolves into a space which desires a cultural individuality and promotes hybridity and syncretism. Contemporary urban drama designed for the proscenium stage includes Dharwadker's concept of urban literary drama, distinct from the spectrum of classical, traditional, religious, folk, intermediary, and common performance genres that have ancient and pre-modern historical roots but have continued to exist even today. The introduction of the cinema as a realist form of art in the 1930s which was more economically attractive was one of the reasons that paved the way for the potential demise of the then urban realist theatre. This in turn must be listed among some of the first causes behind the proliferation of such fusion theatre. The Parsi commercial theatre became one of the key casualties of the movies' success, as the funding of entrepreneurial resources dramatically shifted allegiance to the cinema. Buildings that once housed theatrical shows rapidly became film houses. In the entertainment industry, stage technicians and a significant number of literary talents started looking out for better opportunities. Therefore, modern Indian theatre must be perceived in the background of these conditions after independence, bearing to mind the declining number of urban audiences for meaningful theatre. The theatre of Girish Karnad,

Tanvir, and Tendulkar thus enjoys a significance in the history of 'new' Indian theatre, both because of its connection with an urban audience and because of its meticulous embracing of a realism that was unique to films. Instead of following the mimetic realism of films, they preferred modes of representation that created an alternate and independent cultural expression for theatre.

In reality, the revival of folk theatre had intensified the idea of a rural-urban cultural dichotomy among the intellectual class. Urban theatre was increasingly viewed as imitating the West and Non-Indian modes, while the word rural acquired the prestigious "indigenous" overtone. As a result, some dramatists began to reject Western influence and return to village culture and traditions. By the early seventies, playwrights and directors had started to introduce folk conventions and concepts in their staged plays. Heightened knowledge of rural ways was fed back into the creative process, offering new self-expression opportunities. Complex questions were asked at the Round Table on the Contemporary Relevance of Traditional Theatre, organized by the Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1971, such as the relationship between rural forms and modern values, the position of the urban writer vis-à-vis an unknown regional genre, and the reaction of the urban audience. "As creative artistes we have to confront the traditional, especially in our case where tradition is a continuous living vital force"[2]. These discussions made it clear that the way traditional and urban theatres were to be combined was largely dependent on the individual playwright or director's sensibility.

Ever since India achieved independence, the traditional theatres such as *Yakshagana*, *Tamasha*, *Chhau*, *Nachha, Bhavai*, *Jatra*, etc. have experienced a significant comeback. These regional theatres have recently received attention and some governmental funding from the national and state funding agencies. "Their status has been enhanced by an intellectual reappraisal which views them as the surviving fragments of the ancient Sanskrit dramatic tradition, on the basis of common features such as preliminary rituals, stylized acting and gestures, stock characters like the stage director (*Sutradhara*) and clown (*Vidushaka*), and abundant song and dance. Through annual festivals held in the capital, folk theatre groups from all over India have performed for urban audiences, and Western scholars have also been attracted to

[2] See Introduction, Sangeet Natak 21(Round table on the contemporary relevance of traditional theatre)5-7

study the traditions, as a result, greater familiarity with folk theatre forms has developed in the cities, and the urban attitude has shifted from scorn to curiosity and respect" (Hansen 77).

The drama/theatre of Girish Karnad, the greatest exponent of the roots theatre, must be understood in this context of urban performance, as in plays such as *Hayavadana*, *The Fire and the Rain, Nagamandala*, *Flowers* among others. The dramaturgy of Karnad emphasizes the popularity of a unique urban aesthetic of the twentieth century that has comfortably accepted the fusion "of an antirealist, anti-modern, non-Western, body-centered theatre aesthetic rooted in indigenous performance tradition" (Dharwadker 102) and the traditional drama of the proscenium stage. His theatre is a synthesis of techniques suggested by former traditional stalwarts such as Habib Tanvir, K.N. Panikkar and Ratan Thiyam.

Karnad in almost all of his plays aimed to create a hybrid theatre that reflects the complex subjectivities of post-independence reality in urban India. Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* (1971) is also a fine specimen of urban folk drama. It has effectively used folk-forms in an urban context. Taking up a folk tale of transposed heads from Thomas Mann's adaptation of the tale from *Kathasaritasagar*, Karnad tells a complex tale of issues relevant even today. Such issues include the metaphysical dilemma of identity and wholeness. Aparna Dharwadkar writes, "The outstanding quality of *Hayavadana* as an urban folk drama is that it joins the structure and conventions of *Yakshagana* folk performance with a core narrative that poses philosophical riddles about the nature of identity and reality." Erin B Mee says that it is a hybrid theatre that is both Western and Indian, "With *Hayavadana*, Karnad created a hybrid dramaturgical structure, acting style and visual practice that offers spectators a model for practicing cultural ambidexterity-the ability to successfully and easily operate simultaneously in two or more cultural systems without privileging either one" (Dhadwadker 108).

The city is a perfect example of "in-betweeness" and "inter-ness". It is a migratory and fluid entity that moves keeping pace with its citizens, existing only briefly in certain transient spatio-temporal conditions. The city exists in various forms, and is simultaneously tangible and intangible. People from several walks of life migrate to a city and form hybrid identities for themselves. They exist both in and outside the city. Similarly, there is an inherent 'inter-ness' in *Hayavadana* in terms of theme, production and

origin. This 'inter-ness' connects it to the city life and its subjects. *Hayavadana* borrows its plot at once from a folk-tale from *Kathasaritasaga*r which was further developed by Thomas Mann into a novella, *The Transposed Heads*. Karnad finally creates a play out of it. The original tale is Indian, taken to Germany by Mann and again Indianised by Karnad. Hence it can be called both 'inter-generic' and 'intercultural'. This 'inter-ness' or 'hybridity' is found in its thematic concerns also as the characters in *Hayavadana* suffer from the conflict of *self* and *other* and are trying to deal with the hybrid nature of their existence; just like the postcolonial subject in the city. In the play Padmini accidentally swaps the heads and bodies of Kapila and Devdatta. In reality Padmini was attracted to Kapila's body and Devdatta's head. The accident gives her the perfect combination she desired. The wise men, however, decree that indeed the head is superior to the body. So the head is the *self* and the body is the *other*. The two men in the play however are not able to reconcile with an 'other' body and kill themselves. This conflict was originally between the body and the soul in the folk-tale, in Mann it was between intellect and emotion, in Karnad it has been translated into the dialectics of self and other bearing in mind the contemporary situation of post independence India.

The character of Hayavadana in the play has the head of a horse and body of a man. Like the postcolonial subject he is at a loss when it comes to finding his identity. He belongs to both worlds and does not belong to any at the same time. "Hayavadana comes from two different worlds, but does not feel at home in either. He represents the divided self of the postcolonial subject- a character attempting to decolonize his mind." (Mee 144). The solution that Karnad offers to this problem of ambivalence is in the figure of the Ganesha. Ganesha's power lies neither in the elephant head nor in the human body, but in the hybrid creature created by the fusion of both. In Ganesha we do not find the typical authority of one form over the other but a harmonious existence of both. The roots movement also does the same thing – fuses the rural and the urban without privileging one over the other. In the urban societies life is also about coming to terms with this hybrid existence, where one grapples with the baggage of a regional hangover. The linear narrative of Padmini is interrupted at several levels by using the plots of Hayavadana and Ganesha structured in concentric circles. This allows for a multifaceted and multilayered point of view to the whole drama that an urban audience demands.

Karnad's choice of bringing together men and women from three different classes of society- a Brahmin, a Kshatriya and a merchant not only in friendship but also in marriage -- points to his vision of an equal society. Thus, the play also provides an opportunity to criticize social taboos, restrictions, class-consciousness and inhibitions. It is interesting to note here that switching of heads takes place at a Kali temple outside the main city. So, to achieve anything that is not allowed according to the conventions and norms of a city, one has to go beyond the confines of the city and become an outsider. Interestingly, the goddess chosen here is also goddess Kali, who is a subaltern goddess. She is always associated with darkness. She also does not find acceptance among the elite gods and goddesses and is dark-skinned. Her dark skin could perhaps be a reason for her subaltern status. Also, the polyamorous relationship produced as a result of the exchanged heads erases the liminal gap between the high and the low. Given the fact that it was performed for an urban audience, Padmini's exchanging of heads and bodies can be read as a conscious choice of an urban woman. Contrarily, had it only been a folk drama for rural audiences this would be read as chance or a divine intervention.

A careful study of the 2004 monologue *Flowers* by Karnad, would show how Karnad accomplished his goal of balancing the act between urban literary drama and non-realistic folk forms effectively. As a monologue, the play can certainly claim to be termed a literary drama, as the drama created depends very much on the uttered word, to be followed by action/gesture. It is highly word-centered, as much of its impact depends on the intensity and mood of the spoken word, climax, conflicts, movement, ebb and flow of rhythm. *Flowers*, considering its folk framework, has chosen the vocabulary of the play very carefully in order to appeal to the theatre audience in the cities. The play borrows its plot from a folktale from the Chitradurga region of Karnataka. The play deals with the philosophical question that what would happen if God were truly all-forgiving, overlooking inhumane acts and moral depravity. As the play progresses, the dramatist hits on problems such as the tension between the spiritual and the carnal, between devotion and lust, portrayed by a conflict between the virtuous Brahmin's wife and the mistress Chandravati. The action of the play is centered round the temple room accommodating the *shivalinga*. The

protagonist of the play is a Brahmin who has been faithfully guarding and worshipping the *linga* with delicately beaded flower arrangements through decades of reverence. He collapses when he defiles the *shivalinga* with stale flowers gathered from the body of a courtesan. The matter is however revealed to the public when the chieftan sees hair in the flowers covering the *shivalinga*. The Brahmin prays to God to save him from the humiliation. The public reads this discovery as a divinity in the Brahmin. The Brahmin out of his own guilt commits suicide.

Karnad's plays invest heavily on myth, legend, history and folklore. This however, is not to forget that he is in essence an urban playwright and thespian and his target audience is also predominantly urban. It is interesting to note in this connection that the spaces that he chooses as performance venues for his plays are also urban spaces. Many of his plays including *The Fire and the Rain* were first performed at the Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore in November 1999. Flowers debuted at the Ranga Shankara Festival in Bangalore in October of the same year. This and many of his other plays such as *Hayavadana, Nagamandala* have premiered and continued successful shows in cities across the country. A close reading of such plays make it quite conspicuous that most of them, although based on myth and folklore, cannot simply be called rural just because of the presence of a folk framework or an ancient myth in it; neither should they be assumed to have targeted a rural audience. This is also true of plays penned or directed by, Vijay Tendulkar, K.N. Panikkar, Habib Tanvir and Ratan Thiyam. Dharwadker rightly states, "Although these authors occupy varying positions of proximity and distance from the folk cultures they represent, their plays are uniformly not in themselves the products of folk culture……But in practice, most such plays employ urban performers, use the same theatrical spaces as does realist theatre, and cater to the same audience that patronizes all other forms of urban performances, including film and television" (Dharwadker 320). In her search for a suitable term for such a theatre she calls it "urban folk".

Karnad's plays, in spite of having a deep-seated link with oral folk tradition, are nourished by a culture that substantiates the Foucauldian notion of "author-function" (Smith-Laing 268). The word 'author function ', as used by Foucault, is a concept that substitutes the author's idea as an entity and instead refers to the discourse that surrounds an author or his body of work. As the patriarch of texts, this discursive trend

gave importance to the authors, homogenising them as a single discourse, ignoring the rich varieties which they encompass. The same critical outlook considers the playwright as "author," when applied to the evaluation of Karnad's plays or any other play written in this mode and impregnates a "theatrical" work with "literary" qualities. In Indian theatre, this propensity to offer "literary" stamp to performance is a distinctly urban phenomenon that stems in the colonial notion of "modernity". “Critics have approached these works as literary artifacts; placed them within the authors ‟ respective careers as signaling important new phases in artistic development; analysed them with reference to genre, authorial intention, and audience response; and invested them with considerable cultural capital ” (Dharwadker 321). Thus it deviates significantly from folk performances which are mostly anonymous in nature and do not bear the stamp of authorship. Urban-folk on the other hand, by virtue of its relation to urban cultures of performance, significantly bears the stamp of authorship. Another factor contributing to the urbanity of “urban folk” is its parallel existence in the culture of textuality/print and the culture of performance. Performance plays are totally outside the realm of critical scholarship and commentary, but a ‘literary’ text is open to scholarly criticism and enquiry. As opposed to oral folk-drama, plays in this new mode exist in print and performance and are translated in several regional languages and circulated across the country. This propensity towards textualising theatre is definitely an urban addendum. “However, despite postmodern Western preferences for pre-modern, non-proscenium modes of performances, Karnad chose the mediations of authorship, intentionality, and textuality. His choice indicated that his theatre, instead of being a replication of folk performances, would aspire after an autonomous form with its own aesthetic, cultural, and political objectives in relation to a predominantly urban audience.” (Gupta). In case of a theatrical innovation as this one, it is imperative for the playwright to bring a contemporary sensibility to bear on folk forms. The folk forms must communicate and connect with the immediate audience. This can be achieved by selecting themes and motifs that in the sensibilities of modern viewers may have archetypal resonances, or may serve as mythical prototypes to resolve questions that modernity does not answer. In addition, urban spectators and sites of performance may theoretically be foreign to the rural subject matter, shape, styles, staging conventions. Therefore, it is the duty of both the playwright, and the director, to ensure its success in non-folk locations by highlighting the old conventions through engineered means such as digital acoustics within and beyond the proscenium.

Nevertheless, Girish Karnad's beauty lies in his synergetic mixing of all the elements associated with modernity and pre-modernity in what appears to be a "syncretistic modernity" within the sphere of modern Indian drama/theater. The assimilation of drama to literature and textuality, being accessible to performance practices within the matrix of urban print culture in India, is an aspect of this syncretic performance culture of post-independence India. Karnad's urban folk theatre is not a replication of traditional folk performances, but an independent genre with its own aesthetic, cultural and political goals in relation to a primarily urban audience. In addition, it has also been asserted that in order to create appeal for such a fusion theatre, the urban playwright undertaking a folk subject should be careful to strike a chord with contemporary sensibility. Karnad does that with ease.

Karnad's plays invoke new spaces that are Indian in essence, attitude and mindset, and urban in appeal. Perhaps one of Karnad's aims as a modern Indian playwright has been to bring about a union between the local and the global in modern urban theatre. Maybe Karnad realized the importance of such new mediums of expression for theatre in order to meet a broader city audience base. In his newer plays such has *Wedding Album*, and *Broken Images*, Karnad goes on to explore more directly the spatiality of the city. While going through his oeuvre, however, it is visible that he has effectively combined the two contrasting influences and this fusion theatre bearing contemporary relevance underlines his passion for theatre. Over the course of his dramatic career, Karnad successfully negotiates between these two realms, which were considered otherwise irreconcilable. Girish Karnad says: “To have any value at all, drama must at some level engage honestly with the contradictions that lie at the heart of society it talks to and about” (Karnad 336).

Vijay Tendulkar’s plays examine the interconnection of the private, the social, and the political in multicultural urban environments through the use of social realism. *Ghashiram Kotwal,* however, is an exception in Tendulkar's career. It has been composed entirely as a "musical" that is set in the late eighteenth century and which lambasts Brahman culture in Pune which is a major city in Maharashtra. The play reflects Tendulkar's social self and his idealism. He says, “As a social being I am against all exploitation, and I passionately feel all exploitation must end. As a writer I feel fascinated by the violent

exploited-exploiter relationship, and obsessively delve deep into it instead of taking a position against it. That takes me to a point where I feel that relationship is eternal, a fact of life however cruel, and will never end" (Tendulkar 58). His plays are about the everyday lives of different poor and social outsiders that are subjected to humiliation and pain, poverty, anguish, and death as they negotiate their lives in the city. *Ghashiram Kotwal* is no exception in terms of theme and deals with particular class, caste, gender, and economic ideologies that hegemonise existence in the city of Pune; however it employs folk-conventions in order to present this on stage. It provides an insight into a deep socio-political evil that existed in the city of Pune, in particular, and the state of Maharashtra in general. It employs a semi-historical frame story with this purpose in view. The play was a reaction against the rise of Shiv Sena (a political party) in Bombay, Pune and other parts of Maharashtra during the 1970s. The play set in the city of Pune, traces the rise of the corrupt politician, Nana Phadnavis, for whom an ideology lives only as long as it is saleable to the public. By employing the devices of *Tamasha, Lavani*, Tendulkar actually hints at this contemporary problem faced by people living in the newly built cities of India. The use of folk devices heightens the effect of the play on the audience. Aparna Dhadwardker defines the play as, "a musical play based on late-eighteenth-century Maratha history which critiques caste hierarchies and political corruption through the antithetical resources of 'tradition', and is recognized as a classic of the 'theatre of roots'." (Dhadwadker 273). The play initiates its action with a hymn and Ganapati, Saraswati and Lakshmi come in dancing. This connects it to the *Dasha avatar*a (a form of folk theatre) which begins with these three deities. This opening ritual traces back to the classical Sanskrit drama and serves the purpose of arousing the interest of the audience, and imparting a sense of seriousness to the play.. Here music has not been used without a purpose. According to Pushpa Bhave, "The music and the dance numbers are not embellishments to the narrative .... The changing musical notes express the changing mood . The use of traditional songs and dances effectively sets the background of the decadence of the Peshwas' of Poona of the eighteenth century. The strategic placement of songs and music helps to provide dramatic relief after an unusually tense situation." (46). The use of *lavani* not only underlines the sensuous, passionate element but also aids in providing a comment on the corruption present in the society. The combination of the *lavani* or love song with the *abhanga* or devotional song serves to bring out the contradiction in social values and norms. The chorus helps in establishing the appropriate

mood and gives a kind of commentary on the events of the play. What we have here is a blend of folk forms with mainstream urban drama which has created a watershed creation in the history of Indian theatre.

Ghashiram Kotwal is the story of a villager, who has come to the city of Pune in search of a decent living. But, the unjust treatment meted out to him by the people of Pune turns him into an avenger. Ghashiram is so full of insult, injury and anger that he does not think twice before making his own daughter bait in this game. Ultimately, he ends up losing his daughter's life. Ghashiram's story is the story of thousands like him who moved away from the villages into the industrialized cities, post-independence. But, the monopoly of politicians and rich businessman denied them any rightful place in the city. According to Dalmia, "The folk frame turned out to be more than a convenience, for in spite of its historical matter, it allowed Tendulkar to insist on the universality and agelessness of the social phenomenon presented in the play. The folk form allowed a broader historical and political generalization than would have been possible in a more realistic mode of composition and presentation." (Dalmia and Sadana 208)

Ghashiram is an outsider trying to make a place in the city of Poona. However he faces humiliation again and again. This humiliation turns him into a rebel and he vouches to get his place in the city by right or wrong means;

"But I'll come back. I'll come back to Poona. I'll show my strength. It'll cost you!

Your good days are gone!. I'll come back like a boar and I'll stay like a devil. I'll make pigs of all of you. I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs. Then I'll be Ghashiram again, the son of Savaldas once more."(Tendulkar 2017).

These lines show the identity crisis faced by Ghashiram and millions like him who migrate to the cities in search of a better livelihood. After facing constant rejection and abjection in the city they turn into anti-socials. The play is a condemnation of politicians, policemen and their patronaged prostitutes who form a powerful nexus and create a state of disharmony in the city of Pune. Tendulkar chooses the period of the Pune Peshwa as the immediate background of his play but he actually comments on the socio-political conditions in the contemporary city of Pune which is a major economic, political and cultural hub in Maharashtra. *Ghashiram* criticizes and condemns the so called respected and elite city dwellers who are

involved in corruption, murders, and whoring. The play was involved in a major controversy after its first production because of its oblique critique of the rise of Shiv Sena in the Maharashtra and the havoc wreaked by the unholy combination of criminal politicians, corrupt bureaucrats which destroyed all possibilities of social order and hope in the cities. Ironically enough, power corrupts Ghashiram too. His earlier conviction of cleaning the city of all its evils and injustices once he comes to power seems to die out very quickly. Contrarily, he turns it into a "brutish city".

Dashavatara, a traditional semi-classical form, is used by Tendulkar to investigate a contemporary political problem- the emergence of the demons in public. These demons initially created by political leaders for the purposes of their own power games, ultimately go out of control and threaten to destroy their own creators. The play is indeed a musical one but "the music and dance numbers are not embellishments to the narrative. The changing musical notes express the changing mood" (Bharve 46). The use of *Tamasha* facilitates the commentary on social and political issues and the *Sutradhar* plays a vital role. Deviating from the traditional role of the *sutradhar* as a mere introducer and commentator, Tendulkar makes the *Sutradhar* an active participant in the drama. He brings together all the disparate and different scenes of the play. The use of folk conventions invites an active participation of the audience, too. In *Ghashiram Kotwal* we find the *Sutradhar* directly addressing the audience. The German playwright Bertolt Brecht aims more at a feeling of alienation in the audience rather than any identification or empathy so t hat he/she is distanced and begins to look at the situation in a new light. He makes the audience unmask the contradictions of society and thus help open-up possibilities for change. The same end is achieved by Tendulkar through de-glamorization of history. The ironically comic scene of Nana dancing "effeminately" demystifies the power he represents and shows the hollowness of what he represents so that the audience is made aware of the fact that the possibility of change exists.

These examples show some of the forms in which a playwright can be inspired by rural theatre practices and adapt the same to suit the needs of a predominantly urban audience, as Tendulkar did. He wrote and performed within the aesthetic framework of the folk genre while examining contemporary city issues.

Habib Tanvir surfaced as one of the most important and influential playwrights, directors, actors, and poets in contemporary Indian Urdu and Hindi theatre. He resurrected the tradition of folk performance in India and turned it into a significant part of contemporary drama. Tanvir incorporated the traditional as well as contemporary elements in his dramaturgy making his plays socially meaningful, and a reflection of his liberal, progressive and ethical vision. Habib Tanvir's widely acclaimed *Charandas Chor* (1975) is the most accomplished, applauded, loved and perhaps the most performed play all over the world. The plot focuses on a Rajasthani folk tale which portrays a heroic protagonist and exposes the double standards of the world we inhabit. Tanvir reconstituted the concept of morality and ethics by powerfully projecting the regression of a society where sincerity, loyalty, integrity, moral principles and perhaps professional competence belong to a thief and the so called civilised citizens of elite society are clearly deprived of these ideals. Habib Tanvir's *Charandas Chor* (1975) uses the Chhatisgari *nacch*a style to tell its story to the audience. The play underlines the theme of political hypocrisy and corruption rampant in urban India. "Tanvir embeds his folk narrative in a recognizably contemporary world of social inequality and political corruption" (Dharwadker 350).

The play struck a chord in the local community as it introduced the Chhattisgarhi language as a language for production of a modern play and employed Chhattisgarhi folk actors in a play staged for urban audiences. *Charandas Chor* thus formed a completely new aphorism in contemporary Indian theatre, and its focus was *Nachha,* a chorus that offered commentary by the use of songs. The play is based on a Rajasthani folk tale which portrays a paradoxically heroic protagonist and lays bare the dubious nature of our world. The play delves into the character of Charandas who is at the crossroads of right and wrong.

To use the words of Anuradha Kapur who speaks about experiments with folk theatre, borrowings, innovations, and adaptations of folk forms for an urban setting, these experiments would be worthwhile only if there was "not a disenchantment with today's world but a stake in it". At the same time, it needs to think meaningfully for folk performers themselves, who struggle for existence and recognition in the modern world. Thus urban-folk drama may serve various political, economic and aesthetic purposes. It

can challenge existing realities, subvert them, open up fresh avenues, and target both elite and mass audiences while doing so. Vasudha Dalmia says,

> The modern theatre today is experimental at many levels. Traditionalists could see it as a turning back to long familiar conventions of dance-drama, though it seems much more fruitful to regard this experimentation as a new license to explore, to risk, to disregard and rearrange the accepted hierarchies of classic, folk and popular, and to allow audiences to encroach into performance space. The advantage of working with known vocabularies, be they classical dance, the stock characters of the Bombay film of any given period, or long familiar tales from the Mahabharata, known not only from childhood retellings and from TV serials, but as danced and enacted in *Chhau* from Purulia and *Pandavani* from *Chattisgarh*, is to be able to recharge them with new energy, new relevance. Today, there is more freedom to work across these divides, to take stock characters and play with them, to address issues such as communalism. This experimentation with scripts holds true for work across the metropolitan and small-town divide, engaging insistently with social and political issues, leading often to the scripting of new plays. International festivals may continue to present folk theatre but in the meantime the folk seem to have moved on (Dalmia and Sadana 225).

In conclusion it can be said that the plays under the label of Roots Theatre stand as a cultural metaphor for the duality experienced by many city dwellers in the 1970s where no clear directions could be perceived as to moving away from western modes of art and existence or to embrace it. The solution to this was found in the innovative roots movement wherein two contradictory traditions were brought together into a harmonious union without privileging one over the other. In. other words it became a new idiom for the portraying the complex realities of post-independent India.

Chapter 2

The Restless City: A Theatre of Unrest

"The ultimate answer however is not a city group to prepare plays for and about the working people. The working people—the factory workers, the peasants, the landless labourers - will have to make and perform their own plays. We have deprived them not only of food, clothing, shelter and education, but also of self-confidence. Here we can also help by demystification, by assuring them that theatre is not the monopoly of the educated" (Sircar 56)

For Henri Lefebvre, that seminal theorist of social production of urban space, the city "revealed the contradictions of society". Terror, global warming and inequality are only a few signs to suggest that humanity desperately needs a momentum for reform. More than ever it has become important now to create art that counts. Engaging in research that explores the power of art as an instrument for social change is extremely important. The aim of street theatre is to build a theatrical experience that will lead performers, actors and viewers alike towards some kind of personal involvement in the cycle of peace and justice, be it new conceptual knowledge, a potential emotional reaction to the performance, making awareness and debating a vital component of the project and an important means of assessing its impact.

One of the goals of performance and drama, among others, is to serve as a voice for social justice, and to challenge injustice and offer the hopes and means of a new world to the oppressed. Though movies and television could be watched by many more people, theatre has the advantage of providing the highest degree of impact because of its audience involvement. In addition to protesting against wrongs, theatre frequently incites the audience to action. The word 'protest' is often used to mean political theatre, but it also has a broader meaning. Socially aware theatre may concentrate on societal problems that require action on the part of people rather than that of the state. Both political and social theatre is discussed in this chapter as both of them constitute a theatre of unrest on their own. Although theatre has been very popular in various places throughout history, and has emerged as a social critique it does not simply aim to raise social and political concerns, but sometimes it may attempt to alter the views and attitudes of the audience and the

society at large and in the process inspire social and political change. The main goal of expressing unrest through theatre is to challenge the influence of the powerful: political, religious, or social. Even in cases where it does not try to alter views or call people to action, such theatre is always profitable in getting a fresh infusion of intellectual and emotional support for people who are already believers of reform. Thus, it may play an important role in social and political reform.

In India, leaving out a handful of plays, protest through the theatre has considerably been an urban phenomenon, developed and mastered by the middle-class intelligentsia mostly for middle-class viewership when initially performed in proscenium theatres, but with an all-inclusive audience when moving out as street plays in open spaces. Theatre groups and developmental agencies are increasingly turning to theatre as a tool for conscientisation among the disadvantaged, and in this effort trying to involve the disadvantaged themselves in performance; but these efforts are yet far from materializing as a protest theatre where the initiative comes from the exploited. While the chapter investigates the urbanity of the protest theatre in India, it becomes imperative to know when and where such theatre started, who the participants of such a protest are, how such theatre impacts political and social change, what are the reasons for its prevalence in certain areas as compared to others, whether or how theatre and protest are mutually inclusive or exclusive. In India, literature has represented non-conformity since ancient times but the emergence of protest through theatre has been rather late. Pushpa Sundar says, “Protest through theatre has been significant only in three periods: (a) 1870-1930, (b) 1940-47, and (c) 1960-80. In the first two periods, protest was directed against an alien rule as well as social evils in Indian society; in the last, theatre gave voice to discontent regarding political corruption, economic poverty and social oppression in independent India.” (Sundar125). In the last phase however, the kinds of theatre practiced in the pre- and post-Independence periods differed largely: in the pre-independence period, protest theatre to a great extent followed the traditional Western proscenium theatrical practices. On the contrary, the latter period exhibited the new trends in world theatre, and used the agitprop street genre widely, though not exclusively.

Marxism became a new and resurrected power in the Indian political scene only in the 1940s and about the same time theatre as a medium of protest regained popularity after the stagnation in the 1930s. A sizeable segment of India's middle-class youth, developed leftist leanings and were drawn to the Communist Party, in search of a new, constructive theory of battling the colonial force. The influence of World War II and its opposition to fascism gave rise to the Progressive Movement in cultural circles. Anti-imperialist and anti-fascist authors came together to form an anti-capitalist/anti-feudalist alliance that formalized in the birth of the Progressive Writers Association. Soon after, in 1943, the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) was created. For the first time, authors and artists were directly concerned with issues of hunger, poverty, the harsh working conditions, and subservience of the working classes. Inequalities and injustices prevalent in the society were discussed in the in relationship to class dynamics. It is important to note here that almost all members of the IPTA were educated urban intellectuals and most of their theatre was performed in the urban and semi-urban areas of the country. Gradually urban lower classes and especially those who had migrated to the cities in search of employment became involved in their association. The audience also comprised large numbers of such urban poor.

That the IPTA was created with the specific purpose of protest in mind has been underlined by its redefining of theatre in India, both in terms of themes and performance styles. Taking theatre out of the hands of a privileged class and the luxury of the proscenium it made theatre readily accessible to a segment of society which was previously ignored or was prevented from seeing it. It used many forms such as the *Jatra* and the folk theatre of Bengal, and the *Burra Katha* of Andhra Pradesh and *Tamasha* of Maharashtra in revising plays. Costly set pieces and typical prosceniums were no longer considered to be essential; a new theatrical idiom was created. In the late 60s moving on to the 70s, translations and adaptations of Brechtian dramas became popular as a means of expressing a wider range of sociopolitical issues and have continued to be used to this day.

When the exhilaration of a hard-gained Independence was over, one realized that the achievement of freedom did not solve all problems of India. The equal opportunities pledged by the law-makers regardless

of religion, color, caste, gender, or sexual orientation was not delivered in practice. The untouchable castes were routinely discriminated against, poor and socially disadvantaged as also the peasantry yearned for better land reform policies and better compensation for crops. Workers wanted justified wages for their labour. Communalism remains a major challenge to the society till the day. The theatre of unrest in India was born and established against this historical backdrop. As would be expected, it reflected dissatisfaction as well as a cultural efflorescence. The 1970's was a time of upheaval for several reasons. The adoption of mixed economic policy, the rapid spate of industrialization which drew in large number of people from villages to the cities, the Naxalite Movement, the Autonomous Women's movement, refugee influx from Bangladesh, and several wars brought in drastic changes to the social, economic and political order. Such changes readily caught the attention of playwrights of the naturalist-realist mode who did not hesitate to make theatre a weapon of protest against social and economic exploitation and inequities. The unrest of the 1970s, the People's Revolution with strong Marxist inclinations, produced among other things, a theatre of protest in the urban and semi-urban areas of the country. Urban, educated intellectuals spearheaded this movement. This theatre broke several conventions. Keeping up to its revolutionary name, it moved out of the proscenium, into the streets, nukkads, factories, slums, temple-courtyards, railway platforms etc in its attempt to reach out to the public at large. In most cases this audience comprised factory workers, unemployed youth, labourers who had migrated to the city in search of jobs. But life in the city had not been very kind.

Marvin Carlson said in *Places of Performance*, "places of performance generate social and cultural meanings of their own which in turn help to structure the meaning of the entire theatrical experience" (Carlson 2). In a nutshell, protest theatre in India had this aim in view when it moved to these alternative venues and out to the streets of the city. It was a revolt against any kind of orthodoxy and class hierarchy in theatre. It was an inclusive theatre which paralled the vision of an inclusive society. Writing about the dream city of London in his seminal essay, "*The Conditions of the Working Class in England in 1844"*, Friedrich Engels writes,

> After roaming the streets of the capital a day or two, making headway with difficulty through the human turmoil and the endless lines of vehicles, after visiting the slums of the metropolis, one realizes for the first time that these Londoners have been forced to sacrifice the best qualities of their human nature, to bring to pass all the marvels of civilization which crowd their city; that a hundred powers which slumbered within them have remained inactive, have been suppressed in order that a few might be developed more fully and multiply through union with those of others. The very turmoil of the streets has something repulsive, something against which human nature rebels (235).

What is true of London is perhaps true of any other city. Omnipresence of a nasty indifference, high egotism on the one hand, and despondency on the other has become the mundane reality of urban life. Almost everywhere there is a social war and a reciprocal plunder and more often than not shamelessly under the protection of the law. Inequality is woven deep into the fabric of urban reality in any city across the world; post-independent India is an excellent case in point.

Bengal remains at the top of protest theatre in India (and much of it is concentrated in the city of Calcutta), Marathi and Hindi theatre following it closely. Given its political and economic conditions it is not a much unexpected fact. In the late sixties and early 70s, political theatre became the preoccupation of a great number of professional artists and authors, who wrote on suffering, apathy, and political instability in Bengal. Bengal is a highly populous state and has a considerable literacy rate. Lack of industries and employment remains the cause for large number of people migrating to the other metro cities of Mumbai and Delhi. Although the workforce is predominantly Bengali, the ownership remains in the hands of non-native capitalists. The Partition of India in 1947 had badly weakened the economy of Bengal. Its finances were and still are insufficient for a major reconstruction of its economy. Finally, Calcutta, the city of joy as it stands today and as it was in the initial years after independence is both a liability and an asset. It is one of the most heavily populated cities in the world, with almost a third of its residents staying in some of the poorest slums ever discovered. Many people are jobless, and unemployment is rife in the city; schools and

colleges are crowded, and the public transport is old and overburdened, and wage earners are paid poorly. To add to its contradictions, however, is the existence of an urban middle-class intelligentsia who has emerged as a significant voice of protest. These urban educated intellectuals formed a coterie of playwrights who speak about the dislocation of life in the city. Though not committed to any particular ideology, they tried to change the structure of society by raising conscious ness. Again, political theatre is largely performed by these middle- or sometimes lower-class intellectuals, for the middle class or for the oppressed. Utpal Dutt and Badal Sircar provide significant examples of such plays. However, Sircar and Dutt follow different political philosophies and have different theatrical strategies as well. Sundar says,

> Dutt adheres to Marxist Leninist precepts and believes that theatre must do more than merely expose injustice and exploitation; it must also lead to revolution. Sircar does not subscribe to any political ideologies nor seeks revolutionary solutions. One works on an epic scale and does not hesitate to use the conventions of the commercial theatre in order to draw attention; the other prefers to work intimately for greater impact and uses spartan productions to make theatre available, either free or cheaply, to the masses (Sundar 177).

As a theatre personality, Badal Sircar is equally famous for his 1960s proscenium plays as for his turn to non-proscenium theatre in the 1970s. In 1967 Sircar formed his own group of theatre, Shatabdi. Post 1970, Sircar rejected several of the practices, the fundamental techniques, the traditional features of the art of playwriting and performance, which he himself used in his initial phase. He probably wouldn't care about rejoicing in his success story and tried to appropriate innovative ways to make his theatre a movement for people. Shatabdi's actors were laymen, not experts; they saw the theatre as a zest for life, a cause, not a means of living. Shatabdi relocated to a room or courtyard (angan manch) from the proscenium, then to open air (mukta manch), and at last to the street. Village tour (gram parikrama) was the final stage of Sircar's novel enterprise. This was to break away from a few selected viewers to the broader audience that included a massive number of the working class, peasant farmers, migrant workers, the urban lower middle class. Freed from financial constraints, his theatre was ‘Free Theatre'

> Being a city-bred man, Sircar felt the need to break away from both the indigenous folk styles widespread in India before colonization and the genres "imported" by the British, which were the two predominant theatrical strains in post-Independence India. Sircar's solution was what he called "Third Theatre," a theatre that would employ an idiom unique to the postcolonial urban environment, drawing on the foundations laid by the first and second theatres that so far had peaceably coexisted in India (Mitra 62).

This turn to non-proscenium plays with the intention of bridging the gap between the actor and the viewer and eliminating any class divide between them makes him a significant writer for our research. Sircar aptly captures the ethos of urban Bengal, especially the city of Kolkata, with all its disparities and snobbishness to the people migrating from the suburbs in search of a better life. Sircar's background as an urban planner and civil engineer give insight to the theatre actor and director in him. It is said that he has seen a dream city being built and at once being destroyed. The urban-rural divide tempted him as much as he would write his doctoral thesis on the synthesis of the rural-urban link. Being heavily influenced with the philosophy of Richard Schechner's Environmental Theatre and Julian Becks' Living Theatre, combined with the local social contexts, Sircar's theatre group *Shatabdi* passed a resolution to discard the proscenium permanently in favour of the non-proscenium.

Shatabdi not only rejected the proscenium under Sircar's leadership, but also renounced artificial aids such as elaborate costumes, props, make-up, lights and sound. Instead, the group relied on an indicative environment where a strong message would be conveyed through physical acting and the considerable use of chants, suggestive sounds and alternative music. Sircar said that "live communication" is the key to the new language of theatre that he wanted to establish.

Born in the evolutionary phase of engaged theatre in India, the purpose of Shatabdi was to create awareness rather than effect a change in the urban scenario. Sircar would rather raise people's consciousness than to tell what form this process of change should acquire in order to raise a rebellion. What he tries to convey through his theatre are clear facts, hard realities about what's going on in the city, the complexities of

industrial and .agricultural exploitation, the urban control on rural economy. He believes his mission is to make people aware of the situation. For him, the theater was similar to a fieldwork which should be done effectively in order to accomplish the set goal. His aim was to sensitize people about the incompetent and corrupt system. He wanted to create a change among the wider audience consisting of non-descript individuals. His plays focused on contemporary India's socio-political environment, the state of life and the humdrum of daily routine encountered by the urban middle class.

Sircar had long had the idea of making a sort of montage on Calcutta: Calcutta street scenes, people chatting in makeshift tea shacks and coffee houses, the babu culture and daily scenes in the offices. Instinctively the image of Calcutta as a 'city of processions' suddenly came upon him. That was the birth of *Micchil* (*Procession)*, a play with a distinct taste of Calcutta and its staunch urban sensibility. Sircar replaced the self-agonizing middle-class individual with a prototype of the ordinary citizen in this play. The stage directions of the play clearly state its unsuitability for the proscenium stage. It is to be staged in an open space and audience seats are arranged in structure similar to a maze. The actors move through this maze and the audience appears just like crowds gathered on streets to watch a "micchil". Sircar was of the opinion that this would give them a real feel of the city's streets. There are no individual characters in the play. The dialogues are delivered by a chorus of five men who do not have a name. The concept of Khoka's recurring death is not an abstract idea, detached from urban middle class perceptions, but something that they could well relate to given the socio-political realities of the time. The image of the Guru, the Master and the Police expose the role of money, religion and power to create an atmosphere of violence. Sircar was skeptical of the suitability of its performance in rural areas, but denying expectations the play performed very well in both the city and its suburbs. Sircar concluded that predetermining what would go well down in cities and what would better communicate to villagers was not right.

As the name suggests, the play is about processions, the many processions that have become part and parcel of life in a city; in this case the city of Calcutta. Sircar calls Calcutta a "city of processions". *Micchil* (*Procession*) tells the story of the Calcutta of 1970s where police atrocities were on the rise to curb the

Naxalite Movement. Every now and then young men would disappear, never to be found again. Any form of protest was curbed. So a procession is a form of protest. In our daily lives there are processions for food, vote, death, marriage, unemployment, religious processions etc. It is also a way of claiming one's 'right to the city'. The play's prototype hero shows the lack of individuality and creativity in a sterile urban landscape. As Henri Lefebvre says in 'What About the Street*?'* in *The Urban Revolution:*

> It (the street) serves as a meeting place (topos), for without it no other designated encounters are possible (cafes, theatres, halls).…. The street is a disorder.... the disorder is alive. It informs. It surprises.....revolutionary events generally take place in the street (Lefebvre 18-19).

One of Kolkata's common features, procession, becomes an easy political ritual for registering protest against the State. The play focuses on the manner in which the procession has lost meaning and intent over the past few decades and closes on a hopeful note, with artists and onlookers standing in solidarity to form a procession, believing that an era of hope and change will be initiated by the instinctive coming together of people. The last scene in the play serves to highlight the dramatic act as a real event in people's lives. Finally the cast walks out with people who join the procession with them. Shayoni Mitra says, " Both the closing image and the tune are powerful testimonials to the possibility of social change"(Mitra 62). Like other haunting images of death and absence in his plays, the city of Kolkata also haunts him like a broken dream and his plays try to bring about order in this chaos.

Evam Indrajit, written in 1963, is a unique play in Sircar's theatrical oeuvre Apparently it is only an existential play. It examines the Writer's quest for a suitable subject of his play. What makes it unique is that it does not bring out the unrest that goes on outside , but the unrest that goes on inside the minds of Indrajit and several others like him (implied in the 'evam' in the title meaning 'and') who bear the burden of the failed promises of independence and the false dreams of big cities. They stand for the urban youth, full of possibilities, educated, bright but defeated by the turbulent times of the 70s. A close reading of the play therefore would make it an appropriate play under the unrest theme. He is caught up between inspiration and creative sterility, and is completely ripped between his Mother and his love Manasi. Evam He summons

Amal, Vimal, Kamal, and Indrajit who are part of the audience, to be the characters of his play. Amal, Vimal and Kamal, follow the repetitive pattern of middle-class routine and the monotony it entails. Theirs is a completely uneventful life. Hence they are inadequate entertainment for a dramatic work. Indrajit apparently is different though. He is always restless, looking for ways out of his humdrum life. Manasi, the girl of his dreams is his.first.cousin and so he cannot marry her. He thus ends up marrying someone else. Exhausted by a life of meaningless substitutions, Indrajit discovers that every attempt he makes to break away from his predestined middle-class life leads him back to the predictable pattern he was running away from. In the final pages of the play Indrajit is made to fall in line with the rhyming chorus and is called Nirmal ; Amal, Vimal, Kamal, Nirmal. The Writer rejects this. While everyone else imitate.each other in their trivial existence, the Writer declares that Indrajit like him is special in various ways. Indrajit says:

INDRAJIT: It's your job to write. So write anyway. What have I to do with it? I am Nirmal.

WRITER: But you are not looking for a promotion-or building a house- or developing a business scheme. How can you be Nirmal?

INDRAJIT: But...but I'm just an ordinary man.

WRITER: That doesn't make you Nirmal. I am ordinary too-common! Yet I am not Nirmal. You and I can't be Nirmals.

INDRAJIT: Then how shall we live?

WRITER: Walk! Be on the road! For us there is only the road. We shall walk. I now have nothing to write about-still I have to write. You have nothing to say-still you have to talk. [...] For us there is only the road-so walk on. We are the cursed spirits of Sisyphus. We have to push the rock to the top-even if it just rolls down.(Sircar.56)

Evam Indrajit is an existentialist play in the tradition of Camus and Beckett. It is modern not only in concept but also in technique. It rightly appropriates the angst of the average middle-class youth who is lost in an existential crisis, searching for an identity. The fragmentary nature of the script and the frequent back and forth movement in time creates a perfect montage of the past and present. The language used by Sircar

is the colloquial speech of actual life, “ Badal Sarkar's [sic] Bangla is radically different from the pre-Sarkar the- atre speech in Bangla. That it came close to actual speech is not its only achievement. The economy of words was unknown to several theatre traditions in India”. (Deshpande ii)

By investigating its possibilities to function as popular art within the framework of social structures, Sircar added a new layer of complexity to the concept of protest theatre. He gave theatre a new definition, poetry and purpose. His artistic endeavors were wrapped in his socialist agenda. He agreed to give up everything to work for the masses- “his career as an engineer and town planner, the bourgeois patronage of art, the professional glory of the proscenium and the achievements of a conformist. His theatrical sensitivity, his work, his passion to free art from narrow confines, his sense of responsibility for the destitute bear ample witness to the fact that he was not Amal, Vimal and Kamal; he had carved out a role for himself that gave meaning to his life” (Khanna 34). What sets him apart is the manner in which he uses art to serve society. It is the intent which animates forms and mentors his art. The best theatrical art to him is the something that strikes a chord with the people. By making it sensitive to people's needs, he evolved a new dramatic language. A social cause must be sponsored by art; and the path of achieving this goal should give an aesthetic appeal to it. Badal Sircar was completely aware of the ‘what’, 'why' and 'who' of his art. It was the oppression, discrimination and isolation of the ordinary man, the peasant, the proletariat, the urban middle class, the landless worker etc. to whom he was bound by self professed commitment. Sircar's content, concern, and art abandon the typical ideal of perception of life and society, as well as the notion of the playwright being a visionary; rather, it is doing something with an urge for immediacy that should effect a change in the people and society in practice and rationale. His theatre was founded on the ways and means of heading towards a brighter future, not on the vision of an ideal life. The realization of the common experience of the common people, qualifies him as a reformer and an activist exposing the system's inherent contradictions. His art continues to evolve in both cases, drawing inspiration from the real life experiences. His long theatrical life and influential work continued to acquire different colors and shades in terms of ideas, presentation, location, technical innovation, dialogue and skill; each change occurred in a gradual way

and developed a method to adapt to conditions defined by his socialist perspective. Sircar writes about the situation of the world he lived in:

> Enormous wealth and immeasurable poverty, a devastating flood ruining hundreds of thousands in the villages and a huge crowd of fans gathering to see the film stars raising donations in Calcutta for flood-relief. Construction of the underground railway in Calcutta and 90 percent of the underground water remaining untapped, rendering most of the arable land mono-crop. Satellites in space and 70 percent of the population under the poverty line. Democracy and police brutality, the stupidity of man, the cruelty of man, the achievements of man, the callousness of man— not just in this country, but in the whole world. (Sircar 53)

Utpal Dutt, contemporary of Badal Sircar, was another playwright who gained considerable popularity with his political theatre in urban Kolkata. As mentioned earlier, the kind of protest that Dutt was registering was not only limited to creation of awareness of the injustices but to bring about a revolution. His plays *Angar* (*Coal*, 1959), *Kallol* (*Sound of the Waves*, 1965), *Din Badaler Pala* (*Song of the Changing Times*,1967), and *Tiner Talowar* are some of famous protest plays, dealing with the exploitation of coalminers, the ruthless and authoritative administration of the Congress Party, and the plight of individuals caught in a vicious political system, respectively. In *Dushapaner Nagri (City of Nightmares*), Dutt presents a sad picture of terrorism and police brutality in the city of Calcutta.Charges of sedition was labeled on Dutt for theis play and the performance venues were also attacked by Congressmen. " The Little Theatre Group (LTG), which came into being in Calcutta in 1949 (from its earlier incarnation of Amateur Shakespeareans), could have continued successfully as a repertory company of bright young Anglophile thespians in the city - just as its counterparts have survived and are thriving now in Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore and other Indian metropolises. But the brain behind the LTG - 20-year-old Utpal Dutt - had other ideas" (Banerjee 1848). Dutt with his marked political activism was becoming increasingly frustrated with the elite bourgeoisie, proscenium theatre or urban Bengal. He found that English theater of the day was completely detached from the significant social changes that had influenced the newly formed nation. He believed that his theater

was designed to appeal to the privileged group that was still trapped by the Raj's influence and had failed to connect with the public at large. In 1950, Dutt joined the Indian People's Theater Association (IPTA) branch of Bengal which was known for its Communist affiliation. He was soon disenchanted with the kind of political theatre produced by the IPTA. While the group comprised renowned directors, performers, and scriptwriters, Dutt sensed that the IPTA did not produce what he called "revolutionary theatre." Dutt wanted a young hero who would be the inspiration for the masses to rise up in revolt, but who was also one among them. Dutt's short association with IPTA ended after only ten months. It was then that he started to gain popularity with his political theatre in urban Kolkata.

Arnab Banerjee writes in *Rehearsals for a Revolution: The Political theatre of Utpal Dutt*,

> Hoping to see the workers take up arms against the oppressive forces of society, he considered it crucial to depict the ruling class as a ruthless enemy and to emphasize the urgent need for revolution. The hero in his plays was mostly a young, urban, proletarian hero who was aware of the failings of society, but also aware of his own human failings, such as drinking and gambling. Through his plays Dutt launched his political assault on the bourgeoisie government in New Delhi and West Bengal. He made the audience realize that the oppression depicted on stage is a feature of their own lives and that the rulers have changed but their tactics have not (Banerjee 223).

Dutt in his plays sought to move the urban educated middleclass to revolt against the bourgeoisie rulers. He chose ordinary urban youths as heroes, but wanted these ordinary men to realize their extraordinary potential to force a change in the urban milieu. Dutt was also against any kind of opulence in theatre, or the use of expensive props and settings. He used props which his heroes used in their daily lives, props such as tin-hats, swords-sickles, hammers etc. The language was the everyday language of the rustic folk, not the refined speech of the city, the language of people who had migrated to the city but had been unable to shed their local dialect, the city talk of factory-workers, labourers, slum-dwellers. In the same

essay Arnab Banerjee says, “The use of this slice-of-life language would give an ‘authentic’ picture of the real people of Bengal to the urban middleclass intelligentsia.”(224)

The city as discussed earlier is a conglomeration of people from different walks of life. The city belongs as much to the ordinary as it does to the elite. However, ordinary people such as slum-dwellers are always accorded the status of an ‘outsider’ in the mainstream urban society. This division of the city on the basis of economic class is an issue discussed by Dutt in his play *Tiner Talowar* (1971). The play thus is an attempt to blur the differences between the working classes and the educated middleclass who share the urban and semi-urban areas of the city. Dutt's *Tiner Talowar* was supposed to be a tribute to Girish Chandra Ghosh, the great thespian of the Bengali stage. This play was a big hit and is regarded by crtics and audiences as his masterpiece. However, even in a play whose main inspiration was to pay a tribute to a veteran, Dutt refused to give up his political focus. Kapten Babu (Mr. Captain), the plays hero, declares a battle against the British empire by symbolically swirling the tin sword, the 'tiner talowar'. Dutt's critique was aimed against the authoritarian regime of the Congress, guised under the historical context of the play. The political attack on the oppressive government in the centre and the state becomes obvious to the audience who can very well comprehend that the repression portrayed on the stage is a function of their own existence even today. The central hypothesis evolving out of it is that only the face of the rulers has changed not their ways or intent. Dutt underlines the likelihood of running away from this authoritarian regime by stressing the need for a powerful communist rebellion. Like his protagonists who are extremely enthusiastic regular human beings, the ordinary masses must become furious enough to push for a change of situations. Dutt incorporates elements of *Jatra* in this play by using loud costumes, songs and exaggerated dialogues. The two songs used in the play almost act as a mouthpiece of the playwright and ridicule the urban middleclass of Kolkata.

However, the most important contribution of Dutt to the advancement of a theatre of unrest in India is the politicization of the *Jatra.* Dutt revived this form and modified it to the needs of his political theatre. *Jatra* is a typical Bengali style of theatre. It is very common among countryside viewers, who crowd the

performances by the thousands. "Jatra" literally translates into "traveling", an obvious reference to the travelling performers who have historically moved through the countryside presenting shows there. It is typically characterized with loud costumes and make-up, melodrama, heightened action on stage; a spectacle on stage. Mukunda Das who was the first playwright in Bengal to tap the possibilities of *Jatra* for a modern audience said:

> Topical political figures and situations gradually crept into the mythological framework of the *jatra*. The gods and goddesses became freedom fighters and patriots. The devils and villains were transformed into members of the ruling class. The chorus continued to sing devotional songs but for different reasons. Theirs was a political litany rather than a meditation on the cosmos (Das 91)

Inspired by this idea, Dutt used *Jatra* a weapon for mobilizing the masses to rise up in revolt against any form of dictatorship or oppression in society. He understood and appropriated the suitability of *Jatra* to integrate modern subjects and a contemporary idiom. Traditionally, *Jatra* performances would extend overnight due to its long scripts including lengthy dialogues and songs. When Dutt used this form for a semi-rural, small town target audience comprising workers in factories who had to join duty early in the morning, Dutt was compelled to reduce the length of the performances. It is the impossibility to remain detached in a *Jatra* play that gives it immediacy. The environment is fraught with anticipation as the play unfolds, and a massive crowd reacts to it. The use of popular myth and folk-lore creates an air of familiarity and the audience immediately connects to the drama on-stage. Dutt was overwhelmed at the manner in which *Jatra* mirrored the present while evoking the resonances of historical the past. Dutt claimed that, “this made *Jatra* the true peoples' theatre”.

Dutt’s most famous play in the Jatra tradition is the *pala* (as it is called in rural areas of Bengal) *Sanyasir Tarabari*, (*The Crusade of the Monk)*. The play dramatizes the eighteenth-century anti-British Sanyasi Rebellion. The reception of the play was huge and the viewing public quickly made sense of the work's contemporary political ramifications. The suppression of the Sanyasi uprising and the Naxalite insurgency in Bengal were not culturally and chronologically abstract occurrences for his viewers; they

acknowledged the comparison being made and responded accordingly. Dutt reasserted his faith in the kind of theatre he practised by saying that had the play been performed in a proscenium setting it would not have had the same impact. Arnab Banerjee writes about Utpal Dutt:

> It would seem that his idealism stemmed from his strong confidence in his own art and the revolutionary potential of his audience. Such a conviction was no doubt subjective and to an extent romantic. However, the popular appeal and political ramifications of his work suggest the possibilities of revolutionary theater. At the very least, his theater made the Congress-led governments at both the federal and the state levels sit up and take notice as it garnered popular support for leftist politics in West Bengal. Dutt was the last great political theater activist who was also commercially successful. In spite of his commercial success, Dutt was always steadfast in his theory of the revolutionary theater. Even if he was not able to incite an actual social revolution, he did create a politically subversive theater of a kind that was previously unseen and unheard in Bengal (Banerjee 229).

But perhaps, being a sensitive intellectual, Utpal Dutt faced a dilemma. He seemed to be torn between the principles and value-system he was brought up with, and the disintegration of such a system. Such a dilemma can be seen in Dutts portrayal of the character of “kakababu" in *Agantuk* (The Stranger). He will be recalled as an exceptional Bengali political theatre architect, one who responded aggressively and impressively to the demands of his time.

After independence, street plays as a form of protest theatre was very well received by the public in the '50s and '60s. However, it became popular during the era of political instability from the late 1970s to early 1980s. With the emergency proclaimed by the government, repression unleashed against Communists and the Naxalbari rebellion in Bengal, the stage of revolutionary street theatre ended. Performers were attacked, and almost always by the police. Yet Jana Natya Manch, created in 1973 by Safdar Hashmi, continued the journey.. Hashmi described street theatre as “a militant theatre that provokes the public and mobilizes them to the benefit of uprisings.” Street theatre is devoted to promoting theatrical techniques for

social reform. It fuses art and advocacy and combines the two with its use of artistic creativity. Generations of theatre artists, have believed and argued that theatre has the power to make a difference in the world. The playwright Bertolt Brecht wanted to teach through his plays. He intended performance to be a mature interplay between performers and viewers in his "epic theatre". Not mesmerising or untrue, not meant to feel but to think. He dedicated himself to the idea of theatre as a societal transition. Brecht said, “Theatre is an ally to traditional justice. Art restores meaning in making us responsible human-beings face to face with undeniable facts and circumstances.” (Febres 12). The collaborative bonds formed in theatre can save lives. Leadership in this arena requires contemplating aspects in which radical dramatic restructuring can impact personal and social transformation in an authentic manner. The ultimate commitment in this undertaking is to uplift the art to brilliance when assessing its use as an instrument of awakening and societal change. Theatrical function can be easily used as such in achieving this end. Theatre can be a form of resistance, too. “Social theatre, which often takes the form of participatory theatre, is of a non-commercial character and is not always aesthetically concerned. It takes place in various places— from prison cells, refugee camps, and hospitals to older people's schools, orphanages, and homes. It invites people to take part in the performance by creating discussions based on the issues raised” (Lavrinienko 2014). Political theatre does not necessarily involve audience participation. A play can hypothesize on social, political and economic issues and arouse the viewer to come up with new ways of understanding. However, political activism and theatre may be tied together around the common goal of adding value to social change. .

Street theatre, however, can be seen as an “agit-prop”. The focus on the intentionality of the exchange differentiates this type of theatre from other forms of political theatre, and from mere propaganda. Street theatre performed amidst an unsettled crowd, is a theatre of grim and ashes, noise and colors.- the actors speaking specifically to the audience. It is a sort of conspired confusion in theatre, a replication of the confused reality of the city and its unpredictability. The success of street theatre lies in its performance. The script is precise and depends on the present. Rehearsing the script isn't enough; being in the scene itself is the only way the actors can prepare for action. Indian street theatre is the story of a tale thriving in an Indian

city's streets and roads. Street theatre is a standing testimony of the fact that life is a bricolage of identities formed by practices and roles. One is at once an artist, an activist, a healer and an educator. Richard Schechner the great theorist of Performance Studies says, "The four great spheres of performance-entertainment, healing, education, and ritualising are in play with each other."

Henri Lefebvre was of the opinion that the present constitution of societies is highly oppressive and capitalistic in nature. It isolates particular classes of citizens to get a stable supply of labour in the days to come. Lefebvre called them "dormitory communities". Jen Harvie writes, "…he (Lefebvre) like Situationists believed that the city's streets offered opportunities for genuine social interaction, resistance and disorder, for play rather than work and for (social) use rather than (economic) exchange. In the streets people could reclaim a renewed urban society and their right to the city" (Harvie 52). Street theatre in India, in the 1970s, served precisely the same purpose of reclaiming the citizen's 'right to the city'. This politically motivated theatre that flourished in the lanes and by-lanes of Indian cities found its idiom in the problems of the urban populace ranging from class, caste, unemployment, peasant uprisings, industrial strikes, gender issues etc. Street theatre took up the job of shaking the audience from their slumber and their indifference to things happening around them; in other words the city became 'restless' in revolt. The pioneer of street theatre in India is Safdar Hashmi. Street theatre experienced a watershed moment in 1989 when Hashmi was killed during a play. In the early afternoon, Janam staged a play, *Halla Bol*, for a large crowd of employees at Japur, on the outskirts of Delhi, in support of the CPI (M)'s local campaign.

The initial roots of street theatre in India were deeply inspired by the leftist anti-fascist and democratic ideologies of the '40s. It originated as a means to liberate the working class and empower a revolution. However, the question remains as to why the plays were moved to the streets rather than being performed on a conventional stage. The most important reason that prompted such a move was that street performance artists wanted to involve the audience in social problems addressed by their performances in the open. Additional considerations included bringing about a social and economic inclusivity in theatre as most of the common masses couldn't afford to purchase a stage ticket for their entertainment. However,

most importantly, street theatre emerged in India as a political movement for the poor. Such plays with clear activist propaganda such as poverty, drought, feudal/colonial subjugation, and communal abuse bring to light the social divisions exacerbated by class and religious disparities.

As mentioned earlier Safdar Hasmhi, the founder of JANAM, the pioneer of street theatre in India died when a mob attacked him with iron rods during a performance of his play *Halla Boll*! At Ambedkar Park in Jhandapur, Sahibabad, a semi-rural, semi-industrial area in the outskirts of Delhi. Delhi, where Janam is situated, is an area of contrasts. It is a town of engineered distinctions where a naive city tourist is not likely to see the invisible quarters of misery, poverty and the struggle for existence. It is in these concealed pockets of the city that street theatre burgeoned in India and found its true idiom. Delhi is not just Janam,'s homeground, but also India's political capital. It has grown into a major trade and transport hub. Delhi has a high percentage of migrants, due to its growing importance and flourishing job industry. As a consequence, Delhi is also a rapidly expanding city. Delhi represents a strong example of economic disparities. The migrant arrives here with a fancy imagination of wide roads, posh vehicles, shopping malls, in short, the promise of a better life. However that is only a part of Delhi, a facade held up to the world. With all its chaos the lower middle-class localities reject all such descriptions. It can be compared at best to any small town in India. Janam deliberately chose these localities on the periphery of the city i.e. localities with mazy lanes, overhead wires, the conundrum of human voices and the humdrum of machines. It presented the unpresentable city hidden behind the posh bungalows and green lawns.

The post-partition period in India has seen the highest wave of migration to Delhi. Since then, Delhi continues to be a place with possibilities, rendering it a popular destination for migrants. In Delhi there are two worker groups, the white collar-jobs and the agricultural workers. Because of their economic viability in the city the white collars are the more privileged class. The other class lives in extreme insecurity in slums or *jhuggi jhopries*. Engels says, “Every great city has one or more slums, where the working class is crowded together. Poverty often dwells in hidden alleys close to the palaces rich; but in general, a separate territory has been assigned to it, where removed from the sight of the happier classes, it may struggle along

as it can." The laborers are denied healthy living conditions, proper wages, made to work in inhuman and unsafe conditions, without the basic facilities. Life of industrial workers in the city is extremely pitiful. *Machine* was born out of a controversial work-related issue that in the last years of the 1970s shook the industrial complexes in Delhi as well as in many other parts of the country. The emergency, which was 21 months old, had suppressed and hushed all kinds of opposing voices from Indian civil society. Janam after a hibernating phase in the emergency period came back with a more assertive commitment to social and political causes. Though it stayed away from direct association with any political party, its political goals especially in its association with Marxist trade unions became more than apparent. The Emergency regime's final electoral defeat in March 1978 brought back democratic activities in all regions. This is particularly true on the trade union front. Delivering a mortal blow to the Emergency government, the people voted in a new government, the Janata Party-led government. But this new political assembly showed its anti-worker attitude within a quick span of time. The new government declined any intervention in industrial disputes between the owners and the factory workers. Labor unions failed to find agreeable ways to change the inhumane conditions of existence in the factories. Private armies of mill-owners under the guise of guards treated labor strikes with a firm hand. In one such event, Herig India's workers, a chemical plant in the suburbs of Delhi, were on strike when the stubborn management clearly refused their basic demands of a bi-cycle stand and canteen where they could eat their lunch. *Machine* draws its context from this particular strike. Not only did the management refuse these demands but in a most brutal manner fired on the protesting laborers killing six of them. This was enough to set Janam's imaginative genius on fire at the same time endorsing its revolutionary art.

Machine was first performed to a gathering of 700 odd trade union delegates in Talkatora Stadium, Delhi, who had assembled there to protest against the proposed Industrial Relations Bill. The union leaders who were somewhat skeptical of allowing a play performance in a serious meeting were surprised with the overwhelming response received by the play in the very first performance. By now they realized what a street play could do to a serious trade union session. The incredible success of the play's premier production

prompted the delegates to talk about its political prospects, and subsequently an invitation was extended to the artists to perform at Boat Club, Delhi, where a rally was to be held the next day. The next day they performed to an audience of 1, 60,000 workers. Machine was an instant hit with the urban factory workers and the innuendo used by the performers was more than clear. The workers could instinctively relate the machine to their own lives. The play is a potent example of the oppressed working class' relentless resolve to pursue its struggles despite all obstacles and difficulties. The smooth running of the (human) machine indicates the presence of a positive relationship between the multiple means of production, i.e., money, labor and all other supporting systems. That Hashmi's machine develops snags and friction from the very beginning is a proof of the fact that there are operational and functional blocks in the system. As each component separates the machine, they introduce themselves to the audience. The component parts of the machine are the mill-worker, the security-officer, and the factory-owner. The underlying message in the play is that the whole capitalist system is dependent on the workers to keep their mills going. However, the worker is the most ignored component of the system. As shown in the play, the system will collapse even if one component stops working. Therefore the workers' rights in the city should not be ignored. Such dramatic interference in a proletarian labor dispute presents the striking workers with a symbolic affirmation, thereby motivating them to wage a war for the right reasons. Brechts influence cannot be denied here, the only point of departure being that Hashmi does not recommend direct call for political action , but only exposes the urban cityscape of Delhi and describes the situations leading up to the same.

In keeping with Janam's anti-elitist and pro-proletariat political credo, Janam staged *Halla Bol!* , a play in which its founder was mercilessly murdered. While Safdar was brutally and mercilessly murdered, it's obvious that he wasn't the assailants' sole target. They'd murder Janam's other performers if they could grab them. Their cold-blooded desire to kill, in full view of the public and in the midst of massive number of workers and their families, was more than an invitation for the moment when their path was stopped. It was a message to all involved in the staged drama leading up to the drama of life, that they must not be

participants in the play on the streets that seek to honor and equip the working class to campaign against the city's power structures. The act of killing has been inspired by a desire to choke all voices of dissent.

Gaon Se Shahar Tak was performed by Janam in Delhi in the year 1978. It is about a villager who is forced to become an industrial worker in the city as he loses his small piece of land in the village. It addresses the issues of identity and belongingness faced by the internal diaspora of migrant labours in Delhi. In most cases they are accorded the status of an 'outsider' within the city. In this play, Kalua, is a village peasant who is burdened by debt, a failed crop, and the death of a bull. Left with no option he migrates to the city where he meets several others like him. Soon he is frustrated by the exploitation meted out to them and realizes that there has been no qualitative improvement in his life after coming to the city, only the face of the oppressor has changed. The message was to move the self-centred urban middle-class to shed their complacency and join the urban working class in their struggle against a common enemy. In the play same actor was used for playing the part of the landlord, the money-lender and the policeman. This reinforced their nexus in real life. A sutradhar was used in the play to tie the several scenes together.

A major manifestation of popular street theater today is seen in colleges, universities across cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Bangalore, Chennai, Chandigarh etc. Drama and theater societies composed of a substantial number of people can be located in these institutional groups. These clubs and societies take an active part in cultural events and theatre-festivals. These theater societies are currently engaged in performing some kind of street theatre on issues of current importance and social awareness such a AIDS awareness, Voter awareness, family-planning etc. The spontaneous growth and survival of such theatre groups is proof of the popularity of street-theatre till the day. The content of contemporary street plays does not make a strong political statement as it was in the 1970s; they can at the most be called to address social issues. The government is also using street theatre nowadays to propagate its own agenda. In doing this, government is basically trying to reduce its ability to bring about a social rebellion by appropriating street theater to project own policies. NGOs working towards social change have played an important role in the transition of street theatre to popular theatre. NGOs are actively involved in producing street theater in cities

such as Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata to speak on women's issues, children's issues, environmental issues, and health conditions. The guiding philosophy of several NGO's using street theater has been to use it as a propaganda tool to raise social and personal awareness in the field of their interest. This NGO-ization of street theatre seems to have, as Manjul Bharadwaj stated, shifted the purpose of street theatre from revolution to awareness.

However, with the changing dimensions of street theatre in India, what has remained unchanged is its democratic structure. Actors in street theatre can be anyone out of any background. This easy access of street theater as an art movement has enabled people from the most marginalized segments of society to use it as a platform to voice their concerns. Street theater, in any form, is most impactful when it encompasses poor people actually speaking about their own subjugation, in its ambit. Likewise, the public viewing street theater can also be anybody and everybody. While all cities, big and small, have economically stratified neighborhoods, the city's streets are fully accessible to one and all. So, while a rich billionaire may steal glimpses of street theatre from the window of his luxury car, a complete nobody can also watch the same simultaneously. The language used in street-theatre is the language used by the common man, the colloquial speech of everyday life. Be it vernacular or English, it knowingly discards the use of poetic diction and jargonistic words in order to maintain its slice-of-life approach. Also, by abolishing the stage for the streets, this kind of theatre breaks the physical gap between the audience and the actor. This aspect of physicality of street theatre is another aspect of its democratic nature.

The chapter thus focuses on the conditions for protest theatre to evolve, and articulates why it appears in certain areas and at certain times. One of the conditions is the existence of political and social problems that is the necessary fuel for any theatre of unrest. This in fact underlines the urbanity of protest theatre in India from the 1970s to the present. The turbulent times and the problems faced by large scale migration to cities after independence and the economic crisis in the country made urban India conducive to a theatre of unrest. In the pre-independence period, the protestor's main concern was an alien government, as well as corrupt caste practices in Indian society led by the Brahmins; after independence it was against the

promises of an authoritative government and the promises it failed to deliver. Sundar says, “It is clear that protest theatre develops in those regions where political and economic conditions are the worst and change most desperately needed, though it is not necessary that every severely deprived region will develop a protest theatre. Other necessary preconditions are that (a) through education both political consciousness and literary attainments are high; (b) there are differing political ideologies vying for power; and (c) a strong theatrical tradition exists.”(136). All such conditions are fulfilled by the major cities of India especially the metro cities of Calcutta, Delhi and Bombay. Quite obviously these form the hotspots of protest theatre in India. The plays of Sircar, Dutt and Hashmi are typical examples of theatre where the restlessness of the city and its citizens are put up for audiences to see and in the process connect it to the perceptions of their individual urban realities. In the protest of its citizens, the city becomes restless in revolt.

Chapter 3

'Voices in the City'[1]: A Study of Contemporary Indian English Theatre

In his study of contemporary drama, J.Chris Westgate has found "two defining socio-spatial narratives that are linked with Harvey's geographical imagination" (Westgate xi). The first is the 'initiation narrative' and the second the 'transgression narrative'. The 'initiation narrative' generally tells the story of a character as he tries to adjust to his urban milieu and the crisis he faces in that journey and how he subsequently counters such a crisis. The 'transgression narrative', as the name suggests, is a story of defiance; the defiance could be spatial or social. In other words, such a narrative challenges any form of spatial or social normativity. Contemporary English theatre in India is a sort of 'transgression narrative'. The transgression is at two levels – first in its use of English as the language for theatre beyond the efforts of earlier theatre-makers of India to canonize Hindi as the language of "Indian" theatre; second, in its attempt to break free from the orthodoxy, hegemony and corruption that has come to be identified with the urban environments they inhabit. Several theatre groups have come up in the theatrical hotbeds, largely coincident with the metropolitan cities of the country, which deal not only with written texts but rely only on performance based plays. Ashis Sengupta writes, "Indian plays written primarily in English have of late overcome many of the above obstacles by addressing the complexity of life in towns and metros using a variety of *Englishes* for a vibrant, live theatre… City plays, predominantly in English, is a significant genre now" (23)

Theatre in the later decades of the 20th century rejected all the homogenising tendencies of the years directly following independence. The Not the Drama Seminar organised in 2007 is a living testimony to such a change. It stood up against the 1956 Drama Seminar organised by the Sangeet Natak Akademi. It was the first comprehensive exercise to recognize, describe and standardise Indian National theatre in independent India. The aim was to identify and establish a singular idea of Indian theatre. It was

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[1] Phrase borrowed from Anita Desai's novel of the same name.

assumed that Hindi Theatre was the rightful heir of theatre in a country with a long history of Sanskrit theatrical heritage. One of the seminar's main propositions was to make Hindi the ultimate linguistic medium of the newly independent nation's National Theatre. Shayoni Mitra says, “the oppositional ‘Not’ in the 2007 seminar then is the key to unlocking the aspirational identities of twenty-first century Indian theatre. It is not in Delhi, the nation’s capital, it is not attempting a singular historiography for Indian theatre, it is not concerned with a Sanskritized classical past, it is not positing Hindi as a key, it is not limited to the very elite of the field. From within this emphatic series of negations, emerges a tentative attempt at heterogenous, and perhaps utopic futurity.” Thus the Not the Drama Seminar took a postmodern approach to theatre and recognised the need to deconstruct, and build a theatre that gains momentum from our own experiences. According to Mitra, “the 1990s have ushered in a far more contingent and contestatory approach, a tactic of surviving in an increasingly neo-liberal and globalized cultural landscape” (74).

Since the 1980s onwards a group of young, dynamic, city-bred playwrights have enlivened the urban stage by portraying new cityscapes and by using English as their medium of playwriting. Bold, new and fresh in its approach, theme and dramaturgy, this theatre smells of the city. Dealing with contextual realities, contemporary Indian English theatre is concerned with city-dwellers who are busy negotiating their lives in the city and facing new challenges every day. The rate of social development in India has not been able to keep up with the rate of mechanical urbanization, leading to huge gap between the rich and the poor. Urban India has become a place where the dictum ‘survival of the fittest’ applies aptly. It has become a mad race for capturing a ‘rightful place’ in the city claimed mostly by wrongful means. Violence, suicide, murder, communal strife, rape, abuse have become tools of subjugating the marginalized sections of the city. The same power politics runs internally within urban households for getting a larger share of the limited amenities and resources the members possess. Indian English theatre today has become a site of re-enactment of the complicated dynamics of city-life. Indian universities have also given English theatre a stable and consistent forum, for showcasing drama in English through several in-house dramatic societies. This long tradition of university-level production of English plays has yielded rewards by creating a fresh crop of mostly self-sponsored playwrights writing originally in English. These plays also stand-out in their choice of being performed in English, rather than only being scripted in English. Mahesh Dattani, Abhishek

Majumdar, Ramu Ramanathan Rahul Da Cunha constitute this coterie of playwrights who portray urban conflicts using an English which is assertive, urban and hybrid. Dattani himself says that there are enough issues and challenges in urban Indian society and these automatically form the content of his work. Theatre groups such as Rage Theatre and MAD (Mad About Drama) are performing plays which are a depiction of the populace of the metropolitan cities in their confusions and conflicts both within and without. The discourses that are produced as the characters speak to each other and to the audience are essentially the discourses that run in the cities. Again it is imperative to state here that contemporary urban theatre in India enjoys the heteroglossia of open linguistic practices and underscores the plurality that signalled its birth. In the words of Quasore Thakore Padamsee, "the new writers are not limited to one language. Abhishek Majumdar writes in English and Hindi and Bangla, Irawati Karnik in English and Marathi, Meherzad Patel in English, Hindi, Gujarati; Annie Zaidi in English and Hindi. India is not monolingual, why should its playwrights be?" Nevertheless, this English theatre remains a marginal trend, characterized in many respects by the privilege loops affecting their employment, education and exposure to the global world. But at the same time it also has its connections with changing lives, language and modes of contemporary Indians. It is essentially the theatre of the new urban India of the late 20th and 21st century.

Mahesh Dattani, an Indian playwright who is the pioneer of this trend of playwriting in English, says, "I think there are enough issues and challenges in urban Indian society (the milieu I am a part of) and these automatically form the content of my work". Mahesh Dattani, follows in the footsteps of Nissim Ezekiel and Girish Karnad before him, and is a passionate city artist. The character of his plays is the city, in both concrete and abstract senses. In all his works including his radio plays, the city presents itself in multiple forms. In his works, the city space reaches the stage of theatrical representation as place, subject matter and cultural basis in various ways. It is an environment, a carefully planned and organized spatial area, a place with socially nurtured traditions and rituals, cultural norms and beliefs. Edward Soja in his book *The Postmetropolis*, uses the term ' city space' referring not only to the " architecturally built-in environment, a physical container for human activities", but " more of a mutual and ideational field, conceptualized in imagery, reflexive thought, and symbolic representation, a conceived space of the imagination" . This notion as expressed by Soja is complimented by Dattani in his representation of the

contemporary, urban, postmodern Indian city. The city then ceases to be just a 'place'; it has its own spatiality.

Dattani writes in his book "Me and My Plays" that his plays reflect the milieu he is part of. Hence all his plays are set in megapolises of India. *Dance Like a Man* is set in Chennai, *Bravely Fought the Queen* in Mumbai, *Final Solutions* in Mumbai. What appears from a serious study of these plays is that the writer is infatuated with concocting the idea of the city as a spatial reality of post-modern India. Then it becomes the site of action; the city is not just a static geographical location. The urban space in Dattani is about the mindscapes of the characters. He says in his introduction to City Plays, "All three plays deal with urban dilemmas. Hidden faces, visible screams that leave the characters in moral dilemmas and the denial of the growing void in their lives. It is an ugly face of the Indian society but a face that has been successfully mirrored through these (city) plays. This holding up to our society is necessary, in order to understand the source of its ugliness, and the beauty that eludes it."(Dattani xi)

Like the setting of his plays, Dattani's choice of language is also urban, urban English, the kind spoken by young people in a city, hybrid, bi-lingual and contemporary. It is the English with which he chose to live, a prototype language with Indian undercurrents, a language naturally spoken, heard in urban India in an unselfconscious way. In his foreword to the script of *Final Solutions*, Dattani writes, "I am practising theatre in an extremely imperfect world where the politics of doing theatre in English looms large over anything else one does." After the initial performances of his play, *Dance Like a Man*, he was greeted with criticism for his choice of language: English. It was, considered, quite "un-Indian". As Indians continue to revise their complex relationship with the language, English theatre in India continues to evolve and forge an identity for itself. As India's theatre capital, Mumbai is home to various theatre groups, both young and formalised, researching new ways in which English can be used as the medium of theatre. From established veteran directors Alyque Padamsee, to less renowned and more experimental theatre groups staging plays in very 'Indian English', the modern, multilingual Indian city plays host to spirited performers who care to find and create their own language to communicate with each other and the audience. As Sunil Shanbag says, "As Indians, there are so many languages our ears are used to." In the theatre too we have to take advantage

of it. There is a cohort of contemporary Indian writers today who challenge the concept that English theatre is not 'Indian'. Mahesh Dattani, who was the whistle-blower of such a change, has inspired many after him to unapologetically choose English as the medium of their expression.

The relationships between characters in plays about the city can tell us about changing urban social relations as most of Dattani's plays do. Dattani tries to investigate the lived space of the city by focussing on the individual and collective experience of the characters. Edward Soja compares the investigation and understanding of the lived space to the writing of a biography, "an interpretation of the lived time of an individual...the attempt to understand and describe the lived time of human collectivities or societies". Dattani does this in his plays and gives us an account of a human travelling through his time and city space. Baudelaire calls such character a *Flaneur*, the gentleman stroller who "confounds dominant uses of the city by casually strolling through it, making his own pathways through it, and so his own version of it through his manner of performing it" (Harvie 49). The city often communicates through its citizens, customs and traditions. The spaces Dattani is trying to construct are inextricably linked to global modes of social and cultural practices centred in the city. Such spaces, Soja says, cannot be called simple "environmental containers" of life but they are "by the organisation and meaning of space, a product of social translation, temperament and experience." Dattani does not want to portray an unfamiliar and remote Westernized culture that could not be easily identified with by the urban Indian population. He is rather fascinated with the family structure embedded in the middle-class milieu, the history that the playwright is a member of, and would like to' speak' with viewers of similar backgrounds.

Gendering of spaces is an issue that finds place in Dattani's canvas and he subtly challenges the stereo-types of work and gender. His play *Dance Like a Man* shows us the gendered nature of life in the cities where taking up a profession like dance is considered sacrilegious for a man. It is one of those professions which is reserved for women.. Inherently linked with the characters' personal struggles is the issue of whether or not they can live up to the patriarchal, bourgeois society's standards of what constitutes femininity and masculinity. This is seen in the character of "the dancing man", Jairaj who is scrutinised for pursuing his considerably feminine love of dancing. The "rigid questioning of maleness" faced by the

ambitious woman Ratna, money-controlled power structures, and an upcoming city in the grips of a colonial hangover are some of the issues reflected in this play. Dattani in the play strongly comments on gender binaries and highlights the prejudice encouraged by the city against the act of dancing. This is articulated by Amritlal. “A woman in a man’s world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a woman’s world, pathetic” (Dattani 42). Jairaj tends to be burdened by patriarchy, repressed desires, and conventional role constructs. There are other issues Amritlal has with Jairaj like his interest in growing his hair long. Jairaj needs to have long hair because it will improve his dancing. However, Amritlal says that long hair is a signifier of femininity and that women's attributes are a challenge to Jairaj's masculine identity. Amritlal Parekh is the overbearing father in *Dance Like a Man* who attempts to direct life and choices of his son Jairaj and his daughter-in-law Ratna, despite being considered a socially egalitarian and open-minded person. Jairaj and Ratna are Bharatanatyam dancers. The play starts with Jairaj and Ratna in their sixties, looking back to their earlier hardships during the 1950s when there was a social stigma around *devadasis.* As the play proceeds we see that the city still nourishes this stigma amidst all claims of modernisation and social advancement. The popular perception about this dance form is that it is a prostitutes' dance, and members of "respectable families" do not practise or perform this style. Given that this body of dance has been categorically limited to women, it is twice as difficult for a man to pursue a career in it. Jairaj on the other hand denies to a accept dance as a feminine art form and asserts his independence of choosing any profession he likes to choose. Thus, Amritlal appears in the play as representative of the modern, educated, urban elite who appears liberal on the face only to reveal that it was merely a facade.“ Where is your dance taking you? I want to see what degree of freedom you achieve through your pranks.” (Dattani 89).

Dattani, however, portrays the women as stronger personalities. Both Ratna and Lata have done well in the masculine world, handling both the appreciators and the detractors with equal ability. Additionally, Ratna has succeeded in creating a supportive environment for Lata, her daughter, to become a successful dancer. After being both unsuccessful and tagged as ‘unmanly’ in his life, Jairaj has found ways to draw attention to Ratna's shortcomings. Hence, he recedes back to the essentialism of defined gender roles in order to reveal Ratna's lack of maternal qualities, for to him it is because of her lack of care that their son

Shankar died. Ratna has married outside her community, and Lata is about to marry a man from a different community. The women are not quite and submissive, but both are confident and vocal. Thus, the play also seems to comment on the reversal of gender roles in the city. Here, Dattani has conceptualised the two as more masculine than the men because both of them act as public space protagonists who effectively control the people. Thus, the play is a legitimate query into the social limits of pre-defined practices and spaces for men and women, gender norms, gender roles, and the resultant gender trouble under the pretext of a dispute at an urban home.

Dattani makes use of certain spatial codes to establish the city's lived experience. The background coalesces with the central motifs and Dattani's stage also makes special use of the multiple layers to establish dramatic resonance. The stage settings are built to amalgamate multiple layers, the familial, the societal and the historical. The setting of the heritage home in which the characters live in *Dance Like a Man* is a case in point. It is a play set in the unique space of a modern Indian community, nestled between tradition and modernity. One such spatial code used to generate the conflict between tradition and modernity is the stage direction of the very first act: “A dimly-lit room in an old fashioned house in the heart of the city. Up centre is the entrance to the room – a huge arched doorway. There is a rather modern looking rear panel behind the entrance with a telephone and a modern painting on it. The rear panel can be slid to reveal a garden. Upstage left, a dance practice hall. Upstage right a staircase going to the bedrooms. Downstage right, exits into the kitchen. All the furniture in the room is at least forty years old.” (Dattani 387).

Amritlal’s ancestral home travels over time, changing character with its owners, sometimes dictating to the residents his own terms and conditions. In this sense, the interpretation of space varies with each age. Amritlal carries his own secrets buried within the walls of the house and tries to manipulate the next generation-Jairaj and Ratna-to carry it forward and Jairaj and Ratna do the same to Lata in turn. It obvious from the conversations between Vishwas and Lata that the house is located in a posh locality of the city, “the heart of the city” as they call it. Lata also says that the property is popular among builders many of whom have been eyeing it for a while now. The old sprawling house of Amritlal is a possible site for real

estate development. Earlier in the scene we hear telephonic conversations about the owners' willingness to sell the ancestral property. Dattani subtly addresses the burning issue of the paucity of space in India's cities; the rapid emergence of shopping malls under the effect of widespread urbanization and the proliferation of consumerism in the cities.

The furniture in the room including the old telephone set adds another valuable sign of urban living. The living room is a strange contrast of a modern room with old furniture which Vishwas jokingly says reminded him of a museum. It is actually a miniature version of the Indian city which is alive in all its heterogeneity. Partha Sarathi Dasgupta says, "Dattani's play is symbolic of the urban taste for fakes, the old telephone, now a dummy, being reduced to just a *sign*. It, like the bonsai in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, is a symbol of simulation. However, the dummy phone is a not just a simulation of an archaic model of a phone, it caters to the typical urban desire for the museumisation of the past. As a symbol it attempts at a perfect copy of the past, with the aid of an object – the phone in this case – which at one point of time belonged to a real present."(208). Dasgupta rightly goes on to quote Umberto Eco here who builds upon the 'urban fetish in American popular culture in his book "Theorising the Urban Space". In his work *Faith in Fakes* Eco deals with the concept of hyperreality. Hyperreality as a concept says that 'it does not "exist" or "not exist;" it can be thought of as "reality by proxy."' Both Baudrillard and Eco believe that, "the world we live in has been replaced by a copy world, where we seek simulated stimuli and nothing more." Dattani's stage also therefore is symbolic of a hyperreal urban existence where the past is just a fake, an "authentic fake".

"Let us not forget that there are eighty million English-speaking Indians and that certainly is not a small number. If at all we have to define the region of Indian English, I would use the word 'urban' and not 'elitist'. Elitism has existed in the country for thousands of years," he asserts. In each of his plays Dattani takes up contemporary issues that plague the cities. Communal tensions, gender politics, marginalised sexualities are some of the issues that find place in his plays. In *Final Solutions* (1993), Dattani takes up the issue of communal strife and speaks for the minority sections of the society. The minorities have been subject to exclusionary politics down the ages. They inhabit the same city, share the common spaces, but still they are treated as outsiders. Areas in the cities are ear-marked for minority populations to live in. Just

as the slum-dweller never becomes a part of the mainstream city-dweller, the minorities are also outcasts. As Deborah Stevenson observes: "our cities are becoming even more sharply divided into ghettoes of homogeneity than, previously, was the case. Rather than seeking heterogeneity in their urban lives, people actively seek to avoid contact with difference. The result is the adoption by middle-and upper- class urban dwellers of increasingly elaborate strategies to control their environments and to avoid unexpected encounters with the *other*" (44).

The stage setting mirrors this segregation as three separate places on the stage are used for the Muslim Chorus, Bobby and Javed, and Daksha. The play charts its course around the lives of three generations of an urban, middle-class Gujarati family. Hardika, the grandmother, Ramnik, her son, Aruna, her daughter-in-law, and Smita, her granddaughter. Hardika still lives in memory of the partition of India when her father was murdered by a Muslim. Ramnik is disturbed when he comes to know that his shop actually belonged to a Muslim friend's father, who was killed by his own kinsmen. Smita, the third generation representative of the family is a city-bred cosmopolitan girl. However, she cannot allow a relationship with a Muslim boy because her family still nurtures the stereotypes associated with Muslims. The problem is that people still chose to live in memory, however, a selective memory of the violence of riots, not the good times the communities have shared in the common space of the city. Around the time of the partition riots, the grandmother is divided into Daksha, her younger, more innocent self, and Hardika, her present more sectarian self, who is wary of Muslims. Her son, Ramnik, gives shelter to two Muslim youths, Bobby and Javed, when they are attacked by a mob after riots erupt around a procession of Hindu chariots passing through a Muslim street, allegedly killing the priest. Ramnik is forced to face the painful constraints of his own liberal consciousness and dig out the violent legacies of India's Independence through his night-long conversations with them. The play is indirectly based on the actual communal conflicts in India, where Hindu religious processions took place in the midst of friction between Hindus and Muslims at both regional and national regions. It was linked to the infamous Ram Rath Yatra in 1989 undertaken by BJP leader Lal Krishna Advani from Gujarat to Ayodhya, which was directly due to the Hindu fundamentalist fanaticism that led to the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992, which was founded on the

alleged site of a Hindu temple in the 16th century. As a final solution to this problem of religious fundamentalism in the city the play proposes to tolerate, accept and forget.

Most of the community clashes, shelter-related violence, protests for basic needs, and political violence have been centred in the cities in the last thirty years or so. The population of a city increases both on account of new births and internal migration. The economy has been unable to provide jobs and income for a large percentage of rural migrants, particularly the urban poor. The vast numbers of urban poor who work in the informal sector have limited ability, less schooling, and lower resources than their comparatively superior urban counterparts. Due to the speed of urbanisation in many developing countries, such as India, many rural areas are increasingly becoming parts of urban areas, where the absence of urban facilities and open spaces, cultivable land, and water bodies remain at least in the initial stages of urbanisation. In order to protect the environment, there is frequently a demand to maintain open spaces like this. Urban India has nonetheless become a site of ceaseless struggle for civic amenities, and a place for asserting caste, class, religious, regional, political and gender identities. Private, social and political disputes have led to the loss of life and property on a large scale in the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Delhi, Bengal etc. These are mostly clustered in India's post-independence megapolises. The city witnesses on one hand a rapidly evolving cultural and religious hybridity and on the other hand an effort of traditionalists to preserve a kind of cultural and religious Puritanism. Needless to say, these factors are then exploited by local political forces to water their own vested interests. The play *Final Solutions* is a live example of how theatre has become a place where such facets of city life are represented and highlighting in the process the unique ability of the theatre to create a 'community space' within the urban landscape

“RAMNIK. Nobody is asking you to pray all day.

ARUNA. Who do you think is protecting this house?

RAMNIK. Who do you think is creating all this trouble? (Exits.)” (Dattani 84)

Henri Lefebvre notes: “Any determinate and hence demarcated space necessarily embraces some things and excludes others; what it rejects may be relegated to nostalgia or it may be simply forbidden. Such a space asserts, negates and denies. It has some characteristics of a ‘subject’ and some of an ‘object’ ” (Lefebvre 99).

Spaces in everyday life are well-defined in terms of their purposes, utility, content and qualitative existence. Because of this, citizenship in modern urban areas can become a gateway to a variety of nationalist and authoritarian ideologies. In the plays taken for close study now there is a sense of defined spaces. The overwhelming majority of India's urban and in most cases immigrant population live in slums, the so-called *jhuggi jhopris*, most of them unauthorized and therefore without clean water, sanitation and hygiene facilities. These people never fully become insiders in the city; they are almost perpetually the outsider. They are the ‘other' to the mainstream of the city. Spaces in the city are also ear-marked for the minority populations. The minorities are not allowed to live alongside the Hindu majority population and are not supposed to enter sacred places of the Hindus. In this regard Sanjay Kumar says, “The nature of the urban spaces and their dynamics of exclusion also creates not only the institutionalised slums but also the ' inside' and 'outside' spaces or even endow the domestic spaces with memory and history as in Mahesh Dattani's significant dramatic text, *Final Solutions* (1990), about communalism and its recurring patterns in India.”(8). The action in this play takes place partly within the urban household space and the other half takes place in actual and' forbidden' areas of the city. In terms of the spaces of aggression, the artifacts with which religious groups are identified and also the perpetuation of racial memories are carried out and incidents of reciprocal aggression between Hindus and Muslims post-partition are theatrically re-enacted generation after generation. The city as noted earlier has often been a volatile space where ethno-religious conflict in India has taken place and hence is an important marker of the existence of communalization in it.

As in *Dance Like a Man*, minimal use of characters has been made here. The same actor plays Hardika and Daksha, subtly showcasing the merging of the past and present. A sense of history is created by the use of masks, ramps and spatial delineation. The ramp which is used by the chorus and the masks which the mad mobs wear show the aspects of mimetic crowd behaviour. The mob has no face, it is anonymous, it

has only a religious agenda which it mimics thinking it to be safe because others are doing the same. Such anonymity and mimetic crowd behaviour has become a reality of city-life today. Similarly, the ramp which is a segregated, outside, peripheral space is the place where crucial revelations are made by Smita and Javed. It is here that they raise doubts about the dogmas of religion and the fundamentalism it ensues. It is here that they land up after they go beyond the limits of 'home'. Bobby commits an act of 'desecration' when he picks up Lord Krishna's idol from the puja area. In the background the chorus shouts and violent drum-beating is heard. The use of such background effects is an acknowledgment of the stage's perceived reality and its ability to expose our own secret self. The final scene of confrontation in *Final Solutions* is nothing but pure theatre, as Bobby trespasses into the prohibited area, the sacrosanct *pujaghar* and picks up the idol, showing that all of our conventional ideologies of space and custodianship can be dismantled, simply, with one step.

Dattani says in the Preface to *Collected Plays*, about a comment on *Final Solutions* "Your plays are preaching to the converted! You should do *Final Solutions* in the villages. Such prejudice! How can anyone be so blind to their own remarks? Assumptions galore that the citified English speaking people are all liberal minded and villagers are communal minded and bigoted. Worse is when that particular remark is followed by 'it would make sense in Kannada or Hindi'. Meaning, 'We are not bigots, it's those bloody vernacs who need to think about all this'. That too in the same breath as professing to be liberal-minded people." It is this hypocrisy and complacency associated with the urban populace that Dattani wants to expose through his plays. Be it the Partition of India on religious lines, the Babri Masjid demolition and the Gujarat riots, all of them have been sparked off in urban strongholds of the country as the urban centres are the seats of power. It is from these cities that decisions and policies are taken and such policy-makers make their presence felt. Surprisingly, urban tensions, minor as well as major, often share common bearings with certain dramatic and performance aspects. The highly debated silence of the urban Indian populace, their growing "depoliticization" and connivance in some recent religious conflicts, often refer to the "theatrical" and "spectatorial" facets of urban violence.

While diversity or multiplicity is a major component of urban spatiality, it is at the same time divisive. The Indian city or cities in general are essentially gendered. Deborah Stevenson says that "Women's experiences of urban spaces may be very different from those of men, although it may seem that men and women reside in almost the same areas of the city. Research has shown, however, that in spite of this spatial co-presence, men and women not only use city space in different ways but also experience it differently" (38). Furthermore, since gender roles in Indian society are taken for granted, the gendered nature of urban experience is relatively unnoticed in our country, as opposed to rural communities where conservative diktats leave very little room for divergences. However, Stevenson has a word of caution for such covert discriminations underlying a liberal facade, "the city could be divided (at least at the level of ideology) into discreet male and female zones" (38).She says, "Underpinning this argument is the recognition that men and women traditionally have performed very different roles in society – with men travelling to work each day and women remaining at home to take charge of the household, and care for children and elderly relatives. This segregation is often called the gender division of labour."(38)

While *Dance Like a Man* discusses such gendering of work in the liberated space of a city, *Tara* (1995) takes up the issue of gender bias through the story of conjoined twins Tara and Chandan. The play subtly brings out the pseudo liberalism of the urban societies. It is a play about gender discrimination. Instances of female foeticide and gender discrimination are common in rural societies. However, the urban elite claim to be progressive and liberal. Contesting the fact through this play Dattani exposes their hypocrisy. Chandan and Tara are conjoined twins born into the elite Bangalore household of the Patels and about to be separated by a surgery. Educated members of the family manipulate this surgery and give the third leg to the male child though it would survive better in Tara's body. Our society prefers everything that is male and subjugates everything that is female. Hence, Tara's own mother fails to protest against this injustice and succumbs to the pressures of her father and her husband. The play uses music, flashbacks and frequent movements into the past to bring out the tragedy of Tara. Ironically enough, Chandan apologises to Tara in the end as she cannot even claim the tragedy to be her tragedy. It is after all Chandan's tragedy.

The Unicef website shows an article on Female Foeticide by Alka Gupta. It says that Bachelors in Haryana fly 3,000 km across the country to find a wife for them. For steadily fewer girls in Haryana, the only way to change their single status is to try brides from as far away as Kerala. The brides, it goes on to say, did not disappear immediately. Decades of sex determination tests and female foeticide that has gained dimensions of genocide in the Indian states. The website further says, "This is only the tip of the demographic and social problems confronting India in the coming years. Skewed sex ratios have moved beyond the states of Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. With news of increasing number of female foetuses being aborted from Orissa to Bangalore there is ample evidence to suggest that the next census will reveal a further fall in child sex ratios throughout the country. The decline in child sex ratio in India is evident by comparing the census figures. In 1991, the figure was 947 girls to 1000 boys. Ten years later it had fallen to 927 girls for 1000 boys." As the report suggests it is only a myth that gender discrimination and preference for the girl child are only prevalent in the rural areas of the country. The so called urban elite are equally if not more guilty and harbour the same primitive mindset where the male child is the carrier of the generation. The female child is still a neglected unwanted entity. *Tara* exemplifies this attitude of the urban elite.

Dattani says about Tara, "I see Tara as a play about the male self and female self. The male self is being preferred in all cultures. The play is about the separation of self and the resultant angst" (129). Culturally in India, women or female children were at the receiving end of both open and hidden oppression in the family and civic spheres of life. This sexism is not only directed at the female body, but is often essentially a kind of aggression that combines the emotional and the behavioral, and therefore has long-standing consequences. This trend can be translated from a primitive desire for dominance powered by colonialism in terms of social, fiscal, political, physical, and psychological fall-outs. Sociologically,' patriarchy' could be used as a term for suggesting different kinds of patriarchal control of people through forces that have the organization to aid and abet such crimes. *Tara* (1990) has the ability of wide-ranging community engagement that can promote an atmosphere of understanding, opposition and constructive methods of combating such harmful gender bias. Dattani has brought forth the disturbing truth of a female always playing second fiddle to a male child.

The dictionary of critical theory defines abjection as “both the founding and traumatic moment of separation from the child’s archaic and undifferentiated relationship with its mother, and the process of the expulsion from the body of substances such as excrement or menstrual blood (Kristeva 1980). At the same time, the experience of abjection establishes bodily boundaries by facilitating the introduction of a distinction between the inner and the outer, and then between the ego and the non-ego. It encapsulates the memory of the violence of separation from a level of existence prior to the establishment of object-relations, and the memory is reactivated by the expulsion from the body of abjected substances. The abject is also evoked by the ritual ceremonies of defilement and purification that repeat and reinscribe the universal tendency to regress at the archaic level. The process that establishes boundaries also implies the threat that boundaries can be breached, that meaning can collapse and that subject can be absorbed back into a suffocating relationship with an archaic image of the mother, who is feared as a potential cannibal.” In short abjection can be compared to ‘a state of being outcast’ from one’s own environment. Tara can be read as an abject of her brother Chandan. The patriarchy thinks that Tara is a burden on Chandan’s body. They want Tara’s body to be separated or expelled from Chandan’s body even it means sacrificing Tara’s life. All this after knowing fully well that Tara has greater chances of survival than Chandan. Mee herself points out in ―A Note on the Play, “ Tara and Chandan ―are two sides of the same self rather than two separate entities and that Dan, in trying to write the story of his own childhood, has to write Tara‘s story. Dan writes Tara‘s story to rediscover the neglected half of himself, as a means of becoming whole” (320). The play shows how the amputated female self colludes with masculinity, and how the feminine self behaves as the masculine gene within the household, bearing its influence and contributing to its sustenance. Tara documents how culture, media science and medicine in the elitist city form an unholy connection to unfairly exploit the female body. The play also highlights the role of manipulative doctors and surgeons in the cities who carry on such illegal trade under the guise of doctors. Such acts involve the exchange of huge sums of money and yet again the female body becomes an object that can be traded and sold off. The cities today abound in shady clinics where prenatal sex determination is practiced illegally. Several touts/agents act as middlemen between these doctors and the rich families who practice female foeticide to save their family’s false sense of honour and pride.

The last decade has seen an upsurge in performance of plays in English. This marks a departure from the Dattani tradition in which written plays would be performed for urban audiences. These young playwrights reflect the cosmopolitan nature of Indian Cities where English is no longer the 'alien' tongue but the language closest to their heart. A growing breed of young playwrights around the country are putting aside the long-established theatrical tradition of performing plays based on established scripts, and instead, reacting to the urban realities in which they live, with their original work using unscripted story-lines, monologues, choosing alternative performance spaces. Themes like road rage, widow remarriage, sex before marriage and homophobia are taken up by them. With expanded incentives and innovative scripts causing a buzz in the theatre community, emerging authors may find it easier to 'break through' the stage than ever before. "Abhishek Majumdar Is the Leading Light of a New Tribe of Urban Story-Tellers", reads the headline of an interview published in The Times of India, Bangalore on 27th November 2011. The young and dynamic playwright Abhishek Majumdar, whose play *The Djinns of Eidgah* (2012) was being staged at London's Royal Court Theatre, quite aptly says that "Indian theatre is going through a cultural boom".[2] His claims are justified as one sits through his play *The Djinns of Eidgah* (2013) which probes the Kashmir conflict.

The city denies any kind of homogeneity. No two cities are alike even though they are cities in their own right. While some cities sparkle with social, infrastructural and cultural developments some are torn with violence, blood-shed and internal strife. Somewhere peace is a right and in others a luxury. The paradise on earth, Kashmir has become 'a bleeding city'[3]. Grappling with sectarian strife, insurgency and violence ever since its controversial creation, it is yet to be developed to its full possiblity. *The Djinns of Eidgah* is a city play in its choice of such a city which is a reality in India today. It tells the story of Asrafi and Bilal. Ashrafi and Bilal have grown-up in a war zone and lost peace in the process. They have seen the

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[2] See http://theculturetrip.com/asia/india/articles/abhishek-majumdar-s-the-djinns-of-eidgah-the-ghosts-and-conflicts-of-indian-theatre/

[3] Phrase borrowed from a novel of the same name by British author Alex Preston published in 2010.

extremes of human strife and are torn between "escaping the myths of war and the cycles of resistance…Interweaving true stories and testimonies with Islamic storytelling, the play paints a magical portrait of a generation of radicalised kids, and a beautiful landscape lost to conflict."[4] The dramaturgy is also an innovation of sorts in its use of the technique of *Dastaan*, an ancient story-telling technique used in Kashmir, and fusing it with real life accounts. The use of this technique often blurs the distinction between life and death, natural and supernatural and brings out the confusions and conflicts of the Kashmiris. It rightly reinforces the 'in-between'ness of their existence. Ashrafi cannot get over her father's death, Dr.Baig tries to reconcile the warring sides and Bilal is the epitome of the confused youth who is at the crossroads of ideologies. Junaid, Dr. Baig's son becomes a mujhahideen and stands for young boys swayed by the wrong ideology. The empty stage with minimal props and occasional sounds of bullet firing creates a curfew-like tensed atmosphere that parallels the atmosphere in the city of Kashmir. In such a state it's only luxurious to remain sane. Devoid of melodrama and jingoism, the play presents a poignant tale of a lost paradise, to a generation of metropolitan audiences.

Ramu Ramnathan is an Indian playwright who has written many critically acclaimed plays. The Mumbai Theatre Guide's webpage reads, "Ramu's work bears an urbane testimony to a country that has never been quite easy to decipher. He is a writer who has transformed social and political commentary through the multi-layered tapestry of performance."[5] With their words and ideas, Indian playwrights have evolved and reinvented Indian theatre over the years. While the script can disrupt and repair religious intolerance, class inequality, and chauvinism with the use of basic instruments in a theatrical performance, only a few playwrights have effectively used their pen to this effect. Ramu Ramanathan, a dramatist and director, is one of them. Ramanathan is acclaimed as being one of the most politically aware playwrights of his generation, and his plays have accurately portrayed the world we inhabit. His oeuvre contains works about lost histories, incidents, and characters who, despite their major social, political, and cultural

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[4] See http://www.royalcourttheatre.com/whats-on/the-djinns-of-eidgah

[5] Interview with Ramu Ramanathan By Deepa Punjani for Mumbai Theatre Guide, http://www.mumbaitheatreguide.com/dramas/interviews/27-ramu-ramanathan-interview.asp

contributions, were never heard. Ramanathan's 2005 play, *Cotton 56 Polyester 84* brought up the highly politicised problems of the teeming mill areas and the subsequent impact on the mill workers in the city of Mumbai. The subtitle of Ramanathan's play *Cotton 56, Polyester 84* (2006) reads, "The city that was Mumbai". The subtitle aptly brings out the theme of the play which focuses on the city of Mumbai, at a time when it was still Bombay; in Ramanthan's words, 'a city which is dying'[6]. The rapid spate of industrialization has diminished the importance of the once booming textile industry of Mumbai, run mainly by mill workers in Girani. Ramanathan says in an interview, "The play is very Mumbai. The city was primarily built by the Girani kaamgars. When we talk of Mumbai as the financial capital, the textile mills have been at the core of it in the last 150 years."[7]But globalisation, developmental policies of the government, imported machinery has reduced the life of this community to penury. Mumbai is rapidly becoming a place where there is no place for sub-cultures, the working classes. In this case the mill workers were replaced by machines and malls. Ramanathan goes on to say, "The play is also our own understanding of the present in terms of what happened to Mumbai in the last 50 years. There was a decline of the communists, rise of the Shiv Sena, the arrival of Datta Samanth, the mafia came, and then globalisation. If you understand this process, then you will have a clear understanding of why certain decisions are being taken. The play is of course about the working class, but it's also of a city which is dying."[8] In the play Kaka and Bhau speak out in protest against this capitalist culture but to no avail. Bhau's son eventually joins the mafia because he has no work at home. This was the state of the city of Mumbai

Ramu Ramanthan is undoubtedly quite skilled in the playwright's craft and has been able to offer gripping dramatic frameworks for the research he undertakes for his plays. The play uses drama as a tool to bring to light the highly politicized problem of teeming mill-land area in Mumbai and its impact on the trajectory of the erstwhile mill workers of Mumbai city. The by-line for the play, "the city that was

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[6] Interview given to the Hindu, Published on 3rd August,2007, 'The Inner Enemy', http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-fridayreview/the-inner-enemy/article2273221.ece

[7] See http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-fridayreview/the-inner-enemy/article2273221.ece

[8] See http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-fridayreview/the-inner-enemy/article2273221.ece

Mumbai" hence could not have been more telling. This three-dimensional mural which forms the background of the play is the perfect illustration of the central concern of the play. The towering skyline of the mural hides the spaces that were once the skyline of the city of Mumbai. The audience at once connects to this theme and recognises the essence of the play. Kaka and Bhau are poor mill-workers and act as commentators on this serious socio-political debate. Kaka and Bhau's stories are interconnected. But for a worn out street light and a round seating area the stage is bare. It is evident almost as soon as the play starts that this space is the space that serves as a meeting point where all voices of dissent can be voiced. Its presence is a source of strength and support for those whose voices differ. The plot, dialogue, and live music emphasises the social histories of the characters. Ramanathan's research sources include face to face interviews and meetings with beleaguered mill-workers, live courtroom trials and the book, "One Hundred Years, One Hundred Voices" by Neera Adarkar and Meera Menon. "My every play is a response to the times we inhabit. I have written plays about things that needed attention. Some of them are reflective of society. We have been taught about heroes in the history, but we never get the sense of voices that are second in command and the voices in the shadows that have evaporated," says Ramanathan.

Rage Theatre, based in Mumbai, produces plays written and enacted originally in English. One such play is *Pune Highway* (2004) written by Rahul Da Cunha. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown writing in *The Independant*, London, said "Playwright Rahul Da Cunha exposes the degeneracy of contemporary, moneyed Indian society. The crude, pared down English lacks compassion or grace and becomes a metaphor for India's fast, thoughtless and furious globalization. It is as powerful and challenging as John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* must have been in 1956, or Pinter's early work. It is English again, breaking out and starting out a new trajectory in its unending history". Cunha's love for the city of Mumbai is proven time and again as it keeps recurring as the background of his plays. *Pune Highway* is the story of four friends who land up in a small, dingy hotel room off Mumbai-Pune highway. They are placed in such a situation where they can save either a friend or themselves. Da Cunha puts to test their nature and integrity by placing them in a complicated situation. The way they react provides an insight into the nature and values held by several others of their generation who live in the Indian cities. The Playwright's note to the plays says that it portrays the consumptive nature of the present generation who chose betrayal, greed and disloyalty over

childhood friendship, thinking only of their own survival. The language spoken by the characters is a concoction of colloquial Hindi and Indian English that one often overhears while crossing youngsters in coffee-shops, colleges and other hang-outs of young people in the cities. The scene shifts from the Pune Expressway, to shady hotel room on the way serve to remind us that the play is definitely 'today's'.

His play *Me, Kash and Cruise* (2012) also tries to capture the changing scenario of the city of Mumbai over a span of twenty-eight years. It is the story of three friends, Pooja Thomas (Me), Rakesh Kashyap (Kash) and Parvez Khan (Cruise). The trio relives their life back from 1984 as they witness Bombay changing into Mumbai. They recall everything, from the blasts, the riots, the rise of moral policing, Bollywood mania, etc. and in the process acknowledge the love-hate relationship they have come to share with the city; almost like a "lover's quarrel with the past"[9]. The play is a fine specimen of urban drama for it paints a vivid picture of a city coming of age.

Also emerging in the theatre circles is a Calcutta based group MAD (Mad About Drama), set up by Soumya Mukherjee, Sourendra Bhattacharya and Soham Majumdar in 2011. Their play *With Love, Calcutta* (2014) tells several stories in which there is only one common factor –the city of Kolkata. "We (MAD) came together with only one aim — to talk about things that no one wants to, and in the crudest way possible.

Kolkata, the city of joy, has espoused the interest of several artists over the ages. It was once the cultural capital of India. Kolkata is not only for Durga Puja, it enjoys Eid and Christmas as well. Its lanes and by-lanes are smeared with the history of India's struggle for independence. At the same time it is a metro city inhabited by the urban elite. *With Love, Calcutta* is one of the attempts to talk about such issues in Kolkata. Every short story presents a contradiction that exists in the city, sometimes it's about a 15-year-old who refuses to be happy during Durga Puja, or through a father-son confrontation on old and new values," says Aritra Sengupta , the director of the play which was recently staged at the Prithvi Theatres in Mumbai. He adds to it saying, "The contradictions, which are highlighted in *With Love, Calcutta* are such that people

[9] Title of a book of same name written by Dr.Ranjan Ghosh.

from every city in the world can relate to — be it confrontations between beliefs of older and newer generations, a growing culture of consumerism, globalisation, changing urban aspirations or migration."[10] *With Love, Calcutta* is very 'today', a play which includes today's music, selfies, the debate about Calcutta vs. Kolkata, the 'ghoti-bangal' conflict and so on; afterall these are things that make our ' City of Joy'. The group also uses alternative spaces to stage its plays. For example, the play called *The Burqa, the Bikini and other Veils* (2014) was staged inside the courtyard of *Baitanik*, a heritage building in Kolkata. The play was also staged in a posh pub in Calcutta, Mocha, with Rs.100 as entry fee and a complimentary cappuccino. Its efforts were successful as it drew young enthusiasts into watching and appreciating the play. Moving on with its innovative spirit and search for alternative spaces, the group plans to organize a pub-theatre festival in Calcutta. The very title of the theatre festival, which sounds oxymoronic to the traditional ear, proves the story of contemporary Indian theatre to be a story of crossing boundaries, undergoing a renaissance of sorts. Soumya Mukherjee says that the group plans to release the sound track of their next play in a bookstore. *Sajano Ghotona* (2012), which was staged in Presidency University on the occasion of Nandigram Diwas, is a stinging political satire. The play foregrounds the dirty politics that political leaders engage themselves in, only to remain in power. The play aroused controversy for its oblique reference to Miss Mamata Banerjee, the Bengal Chief Minister's comment on the Park street rape case, "*eta sampurno bhabe ekta sajano ghotona*". The play can be taken as a live example of how the power dynamics mapped in the city comes alive through theatre.

Thus contemporary English theatre in India from 1970s onwards is predominantly an urban phenomenon. The city takes the centre stage for playwrights of the era. The different types of plays undertaken for study when viewed from the perspective of the city are 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. The plays assessed in this chapter revolve around a few evocative experiences with the city and the intricacies of living in them. These texts are charged with possibilities of being acted out on the stage to bring to life the experiences of living in the

[10] Interview given to Hassan M. Kamal , 'A slice of Kolkata in Mumbai', for Midday published on 30th June 2014.

city. The urban climate in the city erects fences and divisions to segregate different communities in order to establish notions such as “insider” or “outsider”. 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; in the present day the city has been opened up in diverse ways by the playwrights discussed in the chapter in their pursuit of a vocabulary of urban experience. All the plays are city plays and the city lives in them. The plays unfold the discourses of the city through debate, disagreement and intervention.

Chapter 4

'Her' City: Indian Women Playwrights

Peter Brooks, a renowned theorist of the stage says, "A man walks across the empty space whilst someone is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged" (Brooks 11). Interestingly, Western and Indian dramaturgy were shaped by man, centered on him, and saw the world through his eyes. The woman's *Voice* was basically unheard till the twentieth century, especially the woman playwright's voice. The plays studied in this chapter engage in decoding the experience of the city as told by women. The emergence of women playwrights in Indian theatre has been rather late. Initially there were only a few women playwrights who preferred to write about their own experiences within the four walls of the house. Varun Gulati and Maithili Anup say in the Introduction to their book *Contemporary Women's Writing in India*, "Traditionally, the work of Indian women writers was undervalued due to the bastion of male privilege. One factor contributing to this prejudice is the fact that most of the women wrote about the enclosed domestic space and their perceptions of the experience within it. As a result it was taken for granted that women could not think beyond the boundaries of the four walls of the home."(Gulati xi) However, the women's movement of the 1970s changed the scenario forever and ensured that women take up subject positions for themselves. Several theatre groups have since come up in the urban centres of the country which try to address women's struggles through theatre. These include Stree Mukti Sangathan in Maharashtra, Dongari Sangathan in Pune, and Theatre Union and Saheli in Delhi. Theatre Union Staged *Om Swaha* in 1980 under the direction of Anuradha Kapur. This play which challenges the consumerist tendencies of the urban society in asking for dowry, is unique in showing a double resolution. The first where the girl eventually dies as she succumbs to the pressure of patriarchy, and the second, where she educates and empowers herself. In doing so it not only challenges hegemonic traditions of the society but also signals a welcome change. The feminist geographer Doreen Massey states, "spaces and places, and our senses of them (and such related things as our degrees of mobility), are gendered through and through" (186). A typical example of this gendering of space is that a male writer/artist who roams around the city does not

play the same role as a woman artist or writer who traverses the city plays. She does not have easy or safe access to the lanes and by lanes of the city, its buildings and neighborhoods such as the golf course, the restaurant, or a dimly - lit underpass; nevertheless, as she can scarcely avoid the gaze of everybody else and she may not be a detached spectator distanced from her surrounding environment. While these differences may be taken as a disadvantage by some, it also provides women writers with the opportunity to more closely identify with the populace and to produce work that echoes this awareness.

Tutun Mukherjee says, "Women's voices have been heard in the dramatic space only in mimicry-repeating the words written for them by men and performing the roles envisioned for them by the male imagination."Drama wasn't a commonly favored genre for women. Therefore the logical question arises if women made meaningful contributions to several other art forms, then why did they not compose plays? Females as dramatists are rarely represented on the literary graph. Though they have excelled in other categories, they seem to have hesitated from writing great plays. Their absence as playwrights, though, should not be taken as their complete absence from the drama circles. They have performed varying roles, and found a multitude of representations. Women have unquestioningly agreed to speak words authored for them by male writers, and willingly played the positions given to them by the male bastion. They didn't attempt to write their own pages. By becoming unseen in their presence, they reinforced the existing production dynamics in theater, and intensified its institutionalization. However, with the coming of a generation of young, elite, dynamic, city-bred women playwrights such as, Manjula Padmanabhan, Poile Sengupta, Annie Zaidi, Mallika Thaneja, women playwrights have gained new grounds. Leaving aside previous concerns of domestic issues and 'women's welfare', they have now taken up bold and complex issues that characterize life in the cities. Issues of rape, sexual abuse, domestic violence, female sexuality, identity crisis, alienation, problems of managing work and family together, are issues that constantly figure in the work of these writers. Performers like Maya Rao, Jyoti Dogra and Amruta Mapuskar are also performing on contemporary issues following unconventional techniques such as monologues and non-scripted plays. Shayoni Mitra rightly says in her essay *Dispatches from the Margins: Theatre in India since the 1990s*, "A coterie of highly skilled artists and astute intellectuals now form a feminist core within

theatrical practice, and much of this new Indian avant-garde is based in Delhi and exists alongside and in spite of national theatre, often chipping away at its traditionalisms and conservatisms from within" (Mitra 80).

Theatre, being a medium that communicates directly to the audience, falls into the public domain among many other things; and women, traditionally considered fit to inhabit only the domestic room, were kept away from articulating themselves in theatre. The same relates to Indian theater, which stayed exclusive to men for decades, but which, with the recent emergence of "feminism" in the 1970s, gradually opened broad avenues for Indian women to articulate their own voices. It also tried to create a "feminist" space. Yet nationally, radical theater was blamed for indulging in essentialism and thus becoming a platform for women's oppression along the lines of gender and caste. Indian women playwrights and producers struck a different note here by starting to build a theater that vowed to highlight disparities that distinguish women from women and avoid any homogenization of their experience.

Urbanization, industrial development and economic growth opened up new opportunities for women in employment. Immediately after independence, however, things were not easygoing for them. The 1960s and 70s witnessed dark and depressing socio-political upheavals in India: the 1960s in political terms reflected the steady deterioration of certain traditions and mores associated with the period of pre-independence. The Congress party faced a debacle in the fourth General elections and none of the parties could prove their majority. A coalition government was formed, giving rise to horse-trading among the MPs. Within three years, India waged two battles-China in 1962 and Pakistan in 1965, crippling its economy further. Significant parts of rural India were affected by food shortage which took a toll of thousands of lives. An economic crisis soon followed, leading to jobs being downsized. Under the rule of the Communist Party of India, agricultural discontent erupted into armed revolution of starving peasants. Naxalbari, a small district town in north-eastern Bengal was the place from where such unrest initiated and by 1967 it spread to other parts of India, as far as some villages in Andhra Pradesh. While it grew into a full-scale revolution through the 1970s, its influence on the cultural scene was sensed. About the same time, the dalits began

working to express their claims for equal rights. The assertive statement of rights by the downtrodden highlighted a previously ignored patch of grass in the Indian society, and fired up responsive writers and artists from urban middle-class backgrounds, who turned their attention to the cultural history of the lower / marginalized Indian order— the landless peasants, dalits, women, tribal people— and their existential issues. The subaltern classes had created a parallel literature. Theatre with clear ideological content found place in it. Almost around this time street theater also made its emergence; hundreds of men and women were writing and staging radical works, agit-prop plays and violent political protest plays. By then, Street theatre had arisen as a powerful platform to illustrate women's issues. It became an interactive way to reveal and relate the experiences of female viewers and express their point of view to the world. Many of the Indian women playwrights and performers develop their plays within these frameworks of social and economic change and rising urbanization, of struggling with modernity and postmodernity, and of reinterpreting national and global ties. Recurrently, in these narratives we discover attempts to chart these developments. The chapter works to create a mapping of city-spaces and the power dynamics within them as represented in the works of such playwrights, discussing how more official representations of the city override women's spatial and cultural representations of the same city. Most of these plays could rightly be called contestatory geographies in their own right. Through theatre, Indian women playwrights respond/react to the restrictive cartography of urban societies and their realities and create mappings that consider the complex transformations of the city-space over the years, particularly with regard to gender relations.

As discussed above, in the tumultuous mid-to late-1970s context, a theatre of social relevance and also the women's movement began to show the path ahead. A variety of stereotyped issues found speech and recognition through theatre. The 'Woman's question' reached the Indian theater scene in a substantial way during the 1980s and 1990s. While feminist theater was a burgeoning cultural form in the 1970s, it originated as a partner of experimental theater and the Women’s Movement. It was in this type of experimental theater and the progressive Women's Movement that women’s theater in India found its idiom; it was also the source and inspiration for the content of such plays. It was searching for a description, and seemed to have found some, finally. It was all in the late 1970s that we really hear the voice of a woman

"speaking" in Indian theatre, not merely constricted to the role of actors performing their character on stage crafted by the man, but by composing plays for themselves and also performing under their own direction. What it has suggested most notably, among many other issues, is the concept of a "women's language" extending onto "woman's theatre" and its possibility to create an entirely new kind of discourse in theatre.

This feminist theater often involved a redesigning of the structure of plot / story, challenging the meaning and presentation of character both on stage and in script. Direct action and continuity in the rational structure of the plot took a back seat and indirect action and disjointedness in the development of the plot prevailed. Non-linear storylines were adopted and any perpetuation of caste, class, ethnicity, gender, religious stereotypes was rejected. This new idiom in theatre criticized male-dominated discourses in its defense of feminist themes. It confronted patriarchal power structures and institutions that imposed conformity. Kaplan says, “When women are freed from constant reproduction, when they are educated equally with men in childhood, when they join the labour force at his side, when wealth gives them leisure, when they are necessary and instrumental in effecting profound social change through revolution- at these points women will protest and breakdown the taboo”.(Kaplan 77). These fortifications of social and cultural oppression ought to be broken, and in reality, woman playwrights have shaken these walls in the last few decades and trespassed into yet another restricted area. It must be said here that theater provides an exceptional freedom of speech and content which "makes the advent of women writers into theatre both necessary and exciting." (Mukherjee 13) Among other things, this offers them an agency for affecting societal, sociological, cultural and behavioral change: “The result is manifest and one may confidently claim that feminine intervention into cultural practice is actually transforming the received ideas about culture, creativity and representation.” Says Tutun Mukherjee; one could not agree more.

Female Indian playwrights added in a meaningful way to the growth and development of theatre from the late nineteenth century, though not adequately. Several notable attempts were made in the 1940s and 1950s, but there was no significant proliferation of texts produced until the last three decades of the twentieth century. Indian women's lives are much more constrained than their western counterparts'.

Relationships between women, their aspirations and their path towards liberation represent the thematic concerns identified and shared by all playwrights. The playwrights, although not completely immune to the impact of Western feminism, have tended more to sensitize the receptors of their works to the problems they face as a part of the Indian society. This corresponded with the emergence of women playwrights as individual cultural producers who managed to liberate the field to accommodate women's experiences and perspectives with' the novelty of their gendered perception, innovative semiotics' and delicate treatment of social issues. This is important in terms of the effect and development of 'Women-Centered Theater' in India because as Tutun Mukherjee says, "theatre as a patriarchal hegemony is quite capable of absorbing female texts, nullifying their cutting-edge, and even turning feminine concerns into new commodities for male consumption."(Mukherjee 15). These slice-of-life pieces give unique observations and new perspectives on it. Grouped together as Women's Drama, it takes shape as a reenactment of heartbreaking narratives, interactions, memories of female characters who refuse and resist any form of consented or unconsented oppression. They traverse Indian life's cultural and social realms and are hypnotizing in their depth and detail, as well as in their hidden and visible brutality, which after all forms part of their daily experience as a woman. These women playwrights, are celebrating "the great adventure called women's lives."

Sengupta says, "the focus has gradually shifted from the relatively narrow concerns of 'women's welfare to the new ideology or programme of 'women's empower, direct and produce plays that tell their story of suffering, resistence, and dreams. This has happened in two different directions—with a group of women directors producing plays in Hindi and regional languages by employing non-linear, anti-realist dramaturgies and, on the other hand, women playwrights writing in English and predominantly in the realist tradition." (Sengupta 22) It is basically the second group that forms part of our study in this chapter.

Much of women's playwriting, as also feminist theories, emphasizes the breaking free from the interior spaces of the home. Luiza Lobo, takes note of "a new vein in women's writing which, while

privileging the subjective, breaks out of the home both physically and stylistically, venturing into an epic mode and the tangled web of city streets" (163). Nevertheless, in the urban plays under review here, many of the stories by women overturn the perceptions of gendered spaces in contemporary theatre. By (re)turning inward to domestic space, they question sexist assumptions. Writing also emanates from within, off the streets, but not generally to praise female subjectivity or to criticize sexist agendas in the family and community. Instead, these stories turn "home" into a voyeuristic scene or a metafictional zone. These plays, instead of romanticizing the internal subjective realm, show the traumatic reality of urban interiors. The protagonists of these plays battle inside the domestic interior space, are victims of fragmented identities, struggle with the informal immigrant economy, or with neighborhood gossip and stigma. One such play is Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out* (1984), based on a real life incident of gang rape that occurred in Santa Cruz area, Mumbai, is a play very characteristic of city life. The play questions the nonchalant attitude of Mumbaikars Bhaskar and Leela, as they silently witness a heinous crime of rape every day, for fear of their own safety. Through this play Padmanabhan actually wants to bring to light the indifference that the city-dweller shows to wrongs happening around him. Every day we read about incidents of rape in the newspapers, spare a sigh or two, and continue to live our lives happily in the cities; until one day we ourselves become victims of the same crime. The play has multiple ellipses, giving the reader the feeling of eavesdropping on ongoing debates, turning the violence and its denial into a dark, repetitive loop. The play turns the case of the gang-rape, commented on by the residents with banality and approval, into an episode of systemic socio-political violence. The domestic urban interior space is neither secure nor private, but burdened with alienation and denial. Padmanbhan here wants to implicate the spectators for their inaction and complacency in situations like this. Frieda, the silent maid in the play could possibly be a representative of the marginalized classes in the city who are only allowed a victim status and not a voice. They are allowed anonymity and not identity. Hence, Frieda has to be silent amidst the cacophony of the city.

Lights Out (1986) pulls out a few significant symbolic characteristics of the highly individualistic and fractured mental life of city-dwellers. As mentioned earlier, it presents a real-life and disturbing incident of gang-rape, abuse, and horrific violence perpetrated on a vulnerable woman in an apartment in the

typical middle-class urban neighborhood of Mumbai. Strangely, this was overlooked for weeks together. *Lights Out* shows not just the schizophrenia of city-life but also strikes a chord with the audience who is also implicated at the end of the play. Through subtle use of theatrical space and technique, the play exposes the fault lines that exist in our mind, which we exemplify in our response to city life. The setting of the play is the sixth floor of a residential tower, where the Bhaskars, a family of a middle-class executive, live. Leela, two kids and the maidservant, Freida live there. The role of Freida requires extra attention since she remains mute throughout the play. The action starts with Leela asking Bhaskar repeatedly if he has "reported it" to the police. The issue that Bhaskar and Leela are trying to discuss is the disturbing shouts and cries that come from the building across the street every night.

One of the important characteristics of postindustrial urban living is the concept of' the “outsider”, which is paradoxically linked to a curious sense of anonymity which it creates. This is also the case with several marginalized communities in large cities who are refused civic rights and services from the state and are therefore considered second-class citizens. The character of Frieda is a classic example of such enforced anonymity in city life. The muteness of Frieda and the special mention of the playwright in the directorial statement of' allowing the audience to wonder what she thinks is an outstanding example of using theatre to reach, capture, and clearly define the issue of anonymity in the city. She's visible; yet she's speechless or helpless. She is a “absent-presence”. She stands for the inescapable erasure of voice of the urban self itself, especially if one is a victim and a perceived 'outsider'. Padmanabhan writes about Frieda, “She remains constantly in sight, performing her duties in a mute, undemanding way. The other characters pay no attention to her, except to give her orders…The audience should be allowed to wonder what she thinks” (Padmanbhan 134). Although it's quite possible that Freida might have been exploited, it's more relevant that she's a regular presence but not once is she allowed to speak. She can best be compared to the spectator who is also outside the realm of the dramatic text, and sits as a complacent observer; not only in reel but in real life as well. The playwright, however, takes a dig at such middle-class complacency in her directorial notes at the end of the play and in the process rightly implicating them. This also highlights the theater's ability to

expose the silence enforced on some of the city's voices rendering them voiceless and powerless in the civil society.

In forceful statement on the problem of spectatorship in the city, Manjula Padmanabhan skillfully uses the inherent possibilities of the dramatic genre. The spectator is also vicariously experiencing the same layer of reality when witnessing what the protagonists think, discuss or allude to in the play. The audience hears screams throughout the discussions between Bhaskar and Leela. Viewed from this perspective, *Lights Out* is also a profound commentary on the current concept of modern urban spectatorship. Besides being stock spectators in town, Leela and Bhaskar also have many of the incredibly interesting features of being a modern urban spectator. Firstly they are yet to decide if they are "inside or outside" of what they watch. This is intimately connected to the notion of responsibility. When we read closely, these two features are also basically dramatic in one way. These features of spectatorship are also endemic to the process of watching a play. As viewers, when we watch a play, we are constantly negotiating whether we are 'inside or outside' of the script, the theatrical space and place. We also try to get rid of any obligation or commitment whatsoever and try to dodge all that is disagreeable to the sensory experiences, distasteful, impermissible or uneasy to remember. Consequently, the concept of' seeing without responsibility' is interestingly similar to the prevalent notion of spectatorship in the process of viewing a play in the contemporary urban space. Leela says: “That we’re part of…of what happened outside. That by watching it, we are making ourselves responsible” (Padmanbhan 35)

The ‘scream’ is a significant recurring motif in the play. Screaming as a loud, untraceable, disturbing and frightening sound, not physically attributed to any particular character on the stage, is the central feature of this play's theatricality. It is also indicated through the dialogues between the characters that the apparent act of torture, which is the cause of the screams of the prey, could also be a “staged drama, a performance!”.This is a way of denying the grim reality staring them in their faces, an escape route.

“Leela (turns to Bhaskar): Well, but what about the screaming!

Mohan: Is it for help?

Leela (turns to Bhaskar): Isn't it for help?

Mohan: Or is it just in general? That matters, you know. After all- it could just be some, you know, drama…" (Padmanabhan 35)

Lights Out becomes a metaphor for "a theatrical act and its reception." We as viewers try to distinguish between the authenticity of everyday experience and the unreality of a theatrical performance. In the play, Leela's dilemma remains unsolved as the three of them keep debating if they should help the victim. They are yet to decide if the cry is authentic or inauthentic. The city's controls on information and communication silence the story such that the narration and its dialogue cover up the event rather than communicating it. The inferences they draw, and the rationale they use, delineates the idea that there is indeed a fine dividing line between human action on-stage and beyond it. The play ends on a hopeless note on the brutal rape and torture of women:

Naina: " Its all over"-

"Leela (disappointedly). Oh! Then it must be over for tonight!" (Padmanbhan 128)

This sums up the tragedy and irony of life in the so called liberated space of a city. As the curtain drops, a small note written on it greets the spectator:

"This play is based on an eyewitness account. The incident took place in Santa Cruz, Bombay 1982.

The characters are fictional. The incident is a fact.

In real life, as in the play, a group of ordinary middle class people chose to stand and watch while a woman was being brutalized in a neighboring compound.

In real life, as in the play, no-one went to the aid of the victims."

Manjula Padmanabha presented the play *Harvest* in the International Play Competition of the Alexander S.Onassis Public Benefit Foundation. The concept note of the festival called for plays that depict "the challenges facing humanity in the 21st Century". The winning entry was Padmanabhan's play *Harvest*.

The dystopian drama set in 2010 Mumbai, imagines a futuristic world in which a transnational company based in the US, The Interplanta Services not only offers organ transplants but also full body transplants to its rich, aged and sick customers. These bodies and major organs are 'harvested' from poor citizens living in various parts of the world. They are contractually obligated to participate in this trade in return of monetary benefits which assure them of a better survival. That such a massive industry could be deemed legal, financially viable, and morally uncontested at a time not very far from *Harvest*'s scripting, suggests that there are many issues surrounding humanity even to the day. The perpetual question of remains- "what constitutes humanity"? Lack of employment and economic crisis have forced the poor people in urban areas of third-world countries like India to become a group of organ traders. Newspapers abound in instances of such rackets where organs and wombs are sold off as a commodity to the rich first world or even the privileged sections of our own country.

Padmanabhan's work envisions how the coloured subjects are also gendered, representing not only a site of overall susceptibility but also a focal point of significant criticism that calls for the eradication of racial and gendered debts. The play suggests that destitute and racially stereotyped women, by commodifying their body parts as well as by engaging in reproductive labor, generate an unstable 'grammar of life'[1].

Padmnabhan focuses initially on the man of the house, in a series of "surrogacies and substitutions" (Kim 218) that will be disclosed as the play unravels. However, the focus shifts gradually to the wife, Jaya, who eventually emerges as the subject that once espouses and subverts "racially gendered debt" (Kim 215). In the first scene of the play, Om Prakash, a twenty-one-year-old man who has just been thrown out of his job as a clerk in Bombay, announces to his family that he's been able to find a new job. The exhilaration on his face shows that this job offers him a better prospect than the previous one. Om ecstatically says,

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[1] Title of an article by Jodi Kim," Debt, the Precarious Grammar of Life, and Manjula Padmanabhan's Harvest." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 1-2, 2014, 215-232.

"We'll have more money than you and I have names for! Who would believe there is so much money in the world?" (Padmanbhan 10)

What is even more intriguing is the fact that Om's new job hardly requires his services on a day to day basis. His mother is surprised, rather shocked to know that he shall draw a salary for doing nothing. In reality Om has made a futuristic contract with the Interplanta Services where he has signed off his organs and his full body to the clients of Inter-Planta Services. To use economic terminology here, we can say that whenever there is a "demand" from a sick-dying client of the US based firm for an organ transplant or a full-body transplant, Om has to 'supply' his body parts. In this case one is reminded of Marx who says about labour in the era of Capitalism, "these newly freed men became sellers of themselves, only after they had been robbed of their own means of production, and all the guarantees of existence afforded by old feudal arrangement" (Marx 875). Marx was perhaps talking about waged labour, and he could not have in his wildest dreams imagined that this would be true of a global market of organ trade and surrogacy which perpetuates in the most gruesome manner the discourses of race, gender and class. Padmanabhan, through her play, is staging a serious and strategic intervention by envisioning a near future when an internationally endorsed industry would engage in the predatory activity of organ trade in the global cities.

At the time when Om accepted the job he was not required to donate his organs instantly. In reality, Interplanta doesn't let him know which organs he would actually need to donate at which time. Om is essentially forced to pledge all of his vital body parts within this contractual system. He is obliged under this racial liability because he is an underprivileged destitute of the Third World and the only earning member of his family. Padmanabhan consciously chooses an impoverished, colored family of the Third World as the 'other' of a first world company with a white, blonde, woman representative. *Harvest* suggests then that the racial stereotypes have not been erased as much in the era of late capitalism and the destitute, brown, Third World is perpetually under the hegemonic control of the white, rich First World.

Although Ginni has essentially exploited Om, Jaya fails to yield. Padmanabhan in projecting Jaya as the voice and epitome of a defensive response, shows a debt bond that does not so much

agree to pay a bailout or ask for a pardon; instead demands that the exploitative contract be abolished completely. It is disclosed towards the end that Ginni was merely a computer-animated image of Virgil, an aging man who has already undergone four full-body transplants. When Om's chance to give his first donation comes, they take Jeetu, Om's brother, instead. The reason for this being Virgil was not only interested in buying a healthy body for himself, but by taking Jeetu's body (who was once Jaya's lover) he could seduce Jaya and use her as a surrogate for his progeny.

"Virgil: we look for young men's bodies to live in and young women's bodies in which to sow their children.

Jaya: What about your own?

Virgil: We lost the art of having children." (Padmanabhan, 86)

Jaya's is a "young woman's body" in which he wishes "to sow his children", but he doesn't want to endanger his life by going to the Third World. Thus, he tells Jaya to get impregnated by assisted reproduction. In the absence of any real touch or contact, Virgil's trick of seduction is still necessary as he wants to "interpellate"[2] Jaya as a willing surrogate mother, just as he had " interpelled" Om as a willing donor. Jaya, a dishonest wife who gives the impression of having very little influence in the household except to denounce her husband's actions sneeringly, eventually turns out to be a face of resistance and an agent of rebellion. She declares straightway that she does not want to be "a widow by slow degrees." (Padmanabhan 21). She realizes early on in the play, the implications and underpinnings of Om offering himself to Ginni almost as as a sacrifical lamb. Through Jaya's protests, Harvest dramatizes how impoverished families are forced to engage in exchanges that "precipitate the precarious grammar of life" (Kim 225); oddly in order to keep their families alive.

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[2] The term interpellation was an idea introduced by Louis Althusser (1918-1990) to explain the way in which ideas get into our heads and have an effect on our lives, so much so that cultural ideas have such a hold on us that we believe they are our own. Interpellation is a process, a process in which we encounter our culture's values and internalize them.

Padmanabhan's most direct contribution in *Harvest* occurs in the end of the play, when it becomes clear that Jaya would not eventually give up to this fragile language of life. Therefore, it cannot be ascertained if she will agree to carry Virgil's child and in the process honour the motivated contract that they have been forced to enter. Unlike Jeetu, she denies being a gestational surrogate and rent out her body parts. Here again, Padmanabhan casts critical light on a booming "womb" industry in which women from poor Third World countries are alarmingly being hired for childless western couples to be a gestational surrogate, India being the oft-chosen country for most of these underhand dealings. The playwright makes Jaya resist this renting of wombs and captures her attempts to reverse the self-other dialectics by way of negotiating the deal to her favour. Jaya says, "Look, I've understood you now. I know you are stronger than me, you are richer than me. But if you want me, you must risk your skin to get me." (Padmanabhan 89). By demanding that Virgil undertake some kind of threat, Jaya attempts to change the prevailing system in which poor subjects are forced to be risk-bearers, to carry on the survival of basic needs. She also claims that people like Virgil who rejoice in the power of money, too have some debts to the world. Refusing to succumb under pressure, Jaya emerges as a strong woman who finally says:

"I'll die knowing that you, who live only to win, will have lost to a poor, weak and helpless woman. And I'll get more pleasure out of that first moment of death than I've had in my entire life so far. And in the meantime I want you to practice saying my name correctly. It's Jaya, J as in Justice, as in Jam." (Padmanbhan 91).

As she herself says that the only thing that is left with her is her "death". Thus the interior of the urban household becomes a site of exploitation and torture,

The isolation of the Prakash family in the prison of their homes can be read as a metaphor for the alienation and isolation of city-dwellers. Like the Prakashs' who are tied to the virtual reality of the "Super Delux Video Couch model XL 5000 with over 750 video channels from across the world" (Padmanbhan 77). City life is also devoid of sociality in a world dominated by virtual media. The video couch in the play is a substitute for real human interaction and socializing. Even among themselves the family members have very

little touch and interaction. So they are in a self-imposed exile of sorts. *Harvest* thus takes up the themes of urban alienation, capitalism and exploitation and brutally exposes the reality of the urban homes.

Shashi Deshpande writes in her Introduction to *Women Centre Stage*, "It is a truth universally acknowledged that anyone in India who writes a few short stories will move on as swiftly as possible to writing a novel. Poile Sengupta is perhaps one of a very small minority who voluntarily moved from short stories to drama." (Deshpande ix). *Inner Laws* was been written by the prize-winning playwright Poile Sengupta, way back in 1994. And after all these years, the play still has a universal appeal and continues to be staged in the urban centres of the country and most recently in Alliance Francaise, Bangalore in January 2020. *Inner Laws* was staged by Theater for Change and Urban Chaupaal; the choice of such locations point to the urbanity of the play. The play is a sarcastic "sit-com" that revolves around five daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law duos. In an interview to *The Hindu*, Sujatha Balakrishnan, the founding member of Theatre for Change says, "When I was doing my masters in psychology in the early 2000s, I read psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar's *The Inner World,* which goes beyond the clichéd mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. In the book, he writes about the "Maternal Enthralment Theory", which is about the mother-son relationship in Indian families. He writes that this theory revolves around how the son looks upon the mother as an authoritarian position. This relationship affects the mother-daughter-in-law relationship and other relationships"[3]. It would not be wrong to say that the play endorses this theory as the play cites the main cause of this antagonistic perception of this relation to be patriarchy's projection of women as women's worst enemy. The play is an attempt to re-negotiate the traditional mother-in-law daughter-in law relationship which has been essentially perceived to be antagonistic. The characters of the play are a group of elite, English-speaking, club going mothers-in-law and daughters-in law. They have both formed the MIL club and the DIL club respectively, the main idea behind which is to demonize their respective mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. However, close to the resolution of the play it is seen that most of the allegations have been blown out of proportion by both parties. The play tries to resolve the differences between these

[3] See Sravasti Dutta. "Those hilarious in-laws." *the Hindu*, [Bangalore], 16 Jan. 2020.

women by showing them their potential to be happy with and for each other. It motivates the viewing public to ponder, and debate and finally attempt to reshape the perceived human behavior to this relationship into a more agreeable bond and a better social order.

This antagonistic relationship primarily breeds out of India's joint family system, where two unknown women, are expected to share a house after marriage. They share not just the same house but the same dining room, kitchen, living area, and as an extension, the same male's attention. This is uncommon abroad where there is no such sharing of space or attention. Therefore the relationship between these two females is not as easy as the mother-relationship daughter; contrarily, they develop some sort of a mutual hostility. In Freudian psychoanalysis, the mother who is now a mother-in-law has a feeling of insecurity bordering on jealousy towards the conjugal relationship between the son and the daughter-in-law.

Inner Laws (1994) goes a long way in creating a "womanist language" in theatre. All the characters in the play are women. This is the uniqueness of the play. However the all-woman cast of the play should not loosely categorize it as a 'feminist play'. It can rather be called a play for women, about women who agree to disagree, and also laugh at their own follies; something which Shashi Deshpande calls, "the final stage of Feminism"(Deshpande, xii). Deshpande writes in her introduction to the play: "I believe strongly that women can meet in peace and joy once they have shed their mawkish notions of themselves. Women share a robust, almost Rabelaisian sense of humour and with their natural predilection towards nurturing, can bring delight and celebration into their world."(Deshpande 72).

With the exception of the central preoccupation with the "in-law relationship", the play mocks other societal issues like the prevalent notion of beauty, education, female attractiveness and the meaningless lifestyles we indulge in. Newly emerging socio-cultural norms have been cultivated by capitalists. Leading among them is the beauty, fashion and entertainment industries that target women and offer them a false understanding of themselves. They propagate the false stereotypes of fairness, slimness and hypnotize them to such an extent that a woman internalizes these ideas. Nevertheless, the play does not criticize an

individual, the characters are only reflective of the perspective they uphold, the argument and the satire not being wild or damaging.

Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, so Said Shakuni (2001), by Poile Sengupta is an innovative play that deals with villains (as opposed to heroes) from two great epics— the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata.* The play provokes sympathy for the demons of the epic. These characters are given depth by associating a humane angle to them. The play highlights the injustice inflicted on these characters and the pre-conceived nature of their portrayal for generations. They meet at an airport as common co-passengers. They eventually begin speaking directly about the way history has treated them. The two characters have been given modern speech, choice of clothing, and attitude.

The title, outdated as it may seem, disguises the contemporaneous nature of issues being addressed in the play; these being the futility of revenge, violence, the received (biased) notions of history, the vilification of deviant characters etc. For this, the play erratically goes back in time to the two epics. *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana*-and draws them into the relevance of the present day. For the first time in Indian Theatre, two coveted villains, Shoorpanakha and Shakuni share the theatrical space. In the play, however, they have no name. They are just MAN and WOMAN. Sengupta explains that she was captivated by the myth about the Kauravas imprisoning and murdering the Shakuni brothers while Hastinapur was extended northwest to Quandhar. Shakuni was the only one to survive. His dice was built from the bones of his brothers and the ultimate motive of his life was to take revenge. Shoorpanakha stands for all the female members of the society who are daring enough to stay single and proclaim their desire for male intimacy without resorting to a pretentious modesty. Such women are perceived to be a threat to the patriarchy and are thus described as *rakshasis* or demons who must be kept in check, imprisoned and punished before the chauvinistic establishment can be upset. Michael Foucault says that the state castigates any voice of protest as "Fallen"[4], because of its perceived threat to the established order of society. A woman who articulates her sexuality and her physical desires is branded as a woman who has fallen from

[4] Term used by Michael Foucault.

grace. Sexuality is a normal and natural instinct. However, for women it is blasphemous and unethical to articulate her sexuality. It should be held in check, unlike male sexuality. While the two defiant characters cross paths in a contemporary situation, the world is threatened by yet another crisis.

The two *dramatis personae* are normally considered villains in popular imagination. Shoorpanakha is almost always portrayed as disgusting and grotesque; she is the one who provokes Ravana to challenge Rama for a battle, in her willingness to exact revenge. Shakuni, on the other hand, the Kauravas' crafty brother, is the kingpin of the disastrous battle between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Nevertheless, although both protagonists are vital to the dramatic plot, they are overlooked once their purpose is served. Ultimately, in Sengupta's tale, it is Shoorpanakha who discourages Shakuni from triggering another vicious cycle of violence. Sengupta tries to investigate the results if the narrative is retold according to their point of view. She continues to ask whether these protagonists have been denied something by the society. What is more interesting is that whether such injustices are meted out even in today's world, to anybody who refuses to be a part of the crowd, any deviant, minority, subaltern? Sengupta asks the audience, "to question ourselves about our received sense of history and myth." (Deshpande 242)

The author's note to the play reads: "The evening before the play premiered in 2001, the world saw on television, the horror of the 11th September attacks on the twin towers of the world trade centre in New York. The co-incidence was chilling. And so was the reminder that the consequence of revenge remains a relentless unending tragedy." This precisely sums up the idea behind writing the play.

Doreen Massey states, "spaces and places, and our senses of them are gendered through and through" A woman performer or playwright who navigates the city does not receive the same treatment as a man. This gendering of space is a common phenomenon of urban life. The female might not have easy or convenient access to certain alleys or offices, monuments and neighborhoods, playgrounds, pubs or a dimly lit boulevard; furthermore, she cannot be a detached observer removed from her surroundings, as she can barely escape others "gaze". Instances of rape in the cities have become a common issue. Sadly, even in the twenty- first century people have not been able to get over the prejudice of blaming a woman's clothes to be

responsible for her rape. Mallika Taneja, part of Tadpole Repertory, a city-based theatre group, staged *Thoda Dhayan Se* (2013), a play based loosely on the Shakti Mill rape case. The play lacks a proper script. The actor's monologue mainly comprises suggestions on being careful that we receive from friends, relatives, parents so that we remain 'safe'. The play is a stinging satire on the objectification of women, the patriarchal discourses of 'appropriate' women's behavior and the 'propriety' of her clothing. *Thoda Dhyan Se* is a strong satire that targets those who associate women's clothing with their abuse. The play's first reading was on an October evening, at a studio in south Delhi. Little did one realise then that it was slated to win a prize at Zurich Theatre Spectakel for performing the English adaptation of the play entitled *Be Careful*.

Mallika's play was a bold move by a woman playwright, for she was not sure if the audiences in Indian cities were prepared for a woman stripping on stage. In the play an actress stands in the middle of the stage in her lingerie and keeps covering herself with clothes. She keeps doing this until she can no longer pile any cloth on herself. In the end she mockingly asks the audience, "*Main kaisi lag rahi hun*?" It is followed by a monologue by the same lady where she questions the male dominated discourses of the society. The play received an overwhelming response in Delhi as also in a small town like Jaipur. Mallika now performs to small groups of urban audiences in their flats, societies, college fests etc. Mallika says in an interview with India Today, "we deal with the problems that limited accessibility causes for artists and audiences. You will find a cinema hall in every locality in the city but you won't find a place to go listen to some music or watch a play. Instead of putting the blame on the larger public, the difficulty of life in this city and an overall dwindling interest in the arts, we have to make the arts reachable and easily accessible." She goes on to say that it is her vision to transform the city-scape through art.

As mentioned earlier the play was a response to the rape of a photojournalist in Mumbai in 2013. Taneja remarks, "It also happened because of December 16. It happened because, when I used to go to theatre workshops by bus, some man thought it was okay to keep his hand on my crotch. It happened because, when I was going home from college, some guy fondled my breasts. I am not separate from my art.

Everything in my life has led to this,"[5] Mallika is one who believes that she is not separate from her art. Her art springs from her life. The playwright knew that she was venturing into a forbidden territory. Initially, Taneja performed the play in her undergarments (for about two years). A number of organizers did not want her, fearing indecency. At present she has even done away with the undergarments. She says she feels free from sartorial regulations in doing so.

Taneja also speaks about how women are carelessly tossed around the concept of "responsibility". Oddly enough, they are supposed to do all they can to keep themselves 'safe' from abusers. "Be Careful!" this is what young girls are instructed to do in terms of actions, behavior and manner of dressing. Apparently a harmless suggestion, the proposition points to a deeply rooted idea in many cultures that it is the duty of women to defend themselves, to be extra-careful in terms of protecting themselves from their abuse. This sinister concept lowers the accountability of a person who could cause them harm; Mallika Taneja has fought vigorously to counter this deep-rooted irony. Being vigilant, in the words of Taneja "careful", is a major aspect of life in India, especially female experience in cities. Living in Delhi, Taneja condemns the hypocrisy engrained in a "vision of women as potential victims." Her body strips a traditional culture bare, piling layer upon layer, exposing its unseen contradictions. Her play is a grotesque parody of the society we inhabit; she begins the performance by staring silently at the audience's face for minutes together, before proceeding further. Then she piles clothes, one on top of another, while chaotically talking about all the things women must be mindful of. She's piles at least fifty clothes on herself by the end of the show and also a helmet on her head, and still the atmosphere is fraught with a question she doesn't ask– " can I finally be safe enough by being this careful?"

Mallika says, "The country we live in today, or rather, those ruling the country fear a strong voice, especially that of a woman's, because for them, this 'transgression' is too much…. They fear camaraderie so they kill dialogue and divide citizens based on religion, caste, gender. But art bridges all these differences.

[5] See Dipanita Nath. "In Her Skin: Mallika Taneja on feminism and her play Thoda Dhyan Se." The Indian Express, 1 Nov. 2015.

Art can pose a real threat to our increasingly fascist state machineries."[6] Mallika's is a voice that dares to shout out and stare the injustices in the face. But as her work speaks volumes on issues such as sexual assault, body, guilt, dignity, equality, gaze, blame and accountability, she realized that there was no other choice but to continue the act by showing a totally naked woman's body- the body which is the site of all the blows. In this, Taneja was inspired by the Meitei women who protested naked against the rape and killing of Thangjam Manorama. She agreed that nudity was essential to her art. Drawing on the common dictum, "Clothes maketh a man", Taneja asserts " clothes do not maketh a woman"; the not being central to the argument.

Thus this chapter seeks to show how women writers respond to the changing urban milieu. It shows how they respond to the dreams and disorder of the city and also how they deal with it. It registers their joys, trials and tribulations associated with their inhabiting these Indian cities. This chapter demonstrates that while they face the same challenges of urban life as men, the population explosions triggered by internal migration, the rapid changes influenced by globalization, the difficulties of travel and relocation forced by inadequate infrastructure, the challenges of tending to career - life compounded by the dissipation of the postmodern human condition, women playwrights propose innovative approaches to these situations, as their perspectives are profoundly influenced by questions of ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality or social background. Also, it shows the struggle of women playwrights in India to compete with their male counterparts and form a sizeable community of women playwrights. Women have come out of their shell and have finally taken the subject positions. Their focus now is not only on waging a war with men, but on the exclusivity of women's experience. By using non-linear plots, bold resolutions, indirect action, female gaze and also by assertively taking on subject positions women playwrights have proved that they have more than 'bodies'. They have a mind of their own; they do not need to be given roles by the patriarchy. Just as in

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[6] Article by Runa Mukherjee Parikh. "'Thoda Dhyan Se': This Woman Tears Down Victim Blaming, Act by Act." The Quint, 27 July 2018.

the cities they are carving a niche for themselves, in theatre also they are devising their own scripts and characters.

In conclusion we may say that all the plays undertaken for study are exhibitory of an apartheid inflicted on women. However, there is a growing awareness of the "physical, mental and moral violence" that they have been subjected to. Women have begun to look them in the eye and script a strong critique of the societal, historical and political fabric that compelled them to continue living in this violence, almost always as victims; sometimes strangely as patriarchal agents and culprits of the same violence. The violence faced by women has many facets. It is subtle and insidious and difficult to recognize, presented under the guise of respect, idealization, concern or protection. The negative impacts of violent acts on a female psyche are deeply complex, hard to comprehend and even harder to eliminate. These plays constitute an empowered output that underscores one of our society's most fundamental concerns. In the course of this chapter I have chosen to look at women writers as a means of uncovering the feminine and feminist voice within the intense production of urban writing over the last few decades. The role of gender in the urban performance and story-telling has been highlighted by the plays under study. The recurrent themes in them are the ones that define city life today including belonging and displacement, nostalgia, loneliness and alienation. Each of these plays provides women with a powerful agency for the staging of urban design. A close reading these plays expose three central topics that form an interrelated network of feminist urban designs: a regression into intimate, private space; a celebration of the body and sexuality; and a challenge to the concept of the documented city. Also it traces the need and the subsequent emergence of a ‘womanist’ language in theatre. The present discussion thus takes note of these key issues, an evaluation of the narrative techniques placed at the disposal of these urban problems by the women playwrights, and the manner in which these concerns interweave with each other to reconfigure urban imaginaries.

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.

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Annexure-I

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ROLE OF THEATRE IN EDUCATION AND CREATING AWARENESS IN RURAL AND SEMI-URBAN AREAS OF INDIA

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Abstract:
There has never been any debate regarding theatre's importance in a child's development and one cannot deny the role of theatre in creating awareness. Theatre has been found to help learners develop critical abilities such as creativity, expressiveness, confidence, communication, collaboration, and language. Regular attendance at theatre classes also fosters the development of capacities such as empathy and comprehension, emotional and social management, rational thought, and higher cognitive abstraction abilities. Retention is also highly high in a drama context, owing to the nature of theatre approaches, which promote active engagement and active on-your-feet learning experiences. All of this incredible potential, however, is painfully constrained when contained inside the confines of a one-period-per-week lesson or a yearly performance. Only when drama is integrated into the regular fabric of a school's curriculum practice can these perks genuinely power learning in the 21st Century sense. From injustice to domestic violence, from substance abuse to poverty, from child marriage to adult education, our society is beset by a plethora of problems, and there is an urgent need for knowledge and reform. Since the dawn of time, art has served as a catalyst for societal transformation. Art has an impact on society by influencing attitudes, teaching ideals, and transcribing experiences over space and time. In this way, art is a form of communication. Theatre, is among the most popular forms of art, is claimed to be a potent vehicle of articulation that raises public consciousness about societal ills. As we view it, theatre in India has a rich history, legacy, and civilization. Thus, theatre as a mode of communication is critical in tackling contemporary India's socioeconomic concerns. The paper thus seeks to explore the potential of theatre as a learning tool for students as well as its role as a suitable medium for creating awareness especially in rural and semi-urban areas of India.

Introduction:

Drama as a form of communication is broad due to its pragmatic as well as creative aspects. It's theatrical to embellish conversation with expression. Dressing in particular styles is theatrical. Impersonating an activity is theatrical. Indeed, possessing such talents benefits an individual regardless of the path they take, particularly in an age when jobs are evolving into the unknown. There is a famous American proverb, "Tell me, and I'll forget. Show me, and I may not remember. Involve me, and I'll understand." This seems to be true, especially in the case of learning and awareness. Children have a short attention span, which makes it even more challenging to get them to concentrate and remember things in today's environment, which is fuelled by technology. Educational institutions, on the other hand, have devised a solution to this problem. Drama is now being used in several institutions to teach. Not only is it being used in academic learning but also in creating awareness in rural and semi-urban areas. Teaching through theatre implies encouraging students to execute a play or a performance around a subject from their syllabus and presenting it in front of the community. The performers gain knowledge of the subject while rehearsing, and the audience gains knowledge from the skit. This approach aids student learning by allowing them to

participate in the learning process rather than simply witness it. Theatre for awareness on the other hand seeks to capture the attention of the spectator who may or may not be educated. Here theatre moves beyond the realm of academic learning and tries to impact the minds of the audience about common issues of everyday life such as electoral rights, health and hygiene, consumer rights, social evils such as dowry, bride-burning, alcoholism etc.

Use of theatre as an educational tool

Drama in learning has been around in some form or another for a long time. The concept, however, has mostly been confined to a test experiment. This concept's expansion has been stifled mostly due to a lack of conviction and administration. However, there are currently student-run clubs within institutions as well as independent organizations taking the lead in improving instructional practices. "We believe that the young minds should explore beyond the four walls, and performing arts is the apt medium for it. Our modules aim at experiential learning and using alternative education means to give students the opportunity to experiment with their ideas, explore their surroundings, experience new situations and express their viewpoints," says Prabhjot Singh, creative director, The Roots India. [1]

Adopting theatre as a teaching tool will aid in the development of creativity. It will be beneficial for every learner if he/she is able to comprehend academic subjects and societal concerns using theatrical practices. Numerous colleges have diverse drama and theatrical communities that present plays, typically street plays, to raise awareness about a variety of social issues, from equality for women to environmental sustainability. When it comes to colleges, there is a life outside the classes. There are legitimate concerns about larger societal issues that intrigues a responsible youth. It is through theatre and its potential for communication that one is able to connect with and comprehend the situation. Having said that, it also needs to be mentioned here that drama as a teaching tool is no longer restricted to social themes only; it is gradually travelling into the classrooms. A multidisciplinary perspective provides a broad intellectual foundation for all forms of humanistic inquiry. Students develop their ability to read critically, write persuasively, and think broadly by examining themes, ideas, and approaches from the humanities and arts, as well as the social sciences. These abilities raise their classroom interactions and bolster their social and cultural understanding; they develop the tools essential to tackle the world's most complicated situations. Theatrical presentations encourage students to explore not just how to solve problems, but also which problems to solve and why, in the process preparing them for positions of responsibility and a life of commitment and service to the nation and humankind as a whole.

While many third-party organisations are bringing this change in colleges; schools themselves are taking the initiative. Shiv Nadar School has a whole theatre team that helps students understand the curricula through drama and run various programmes and courses. "When we help students prepare the plays, the course teachers are involved. So, we know that the students are getting the right information. We research about the subjects like an educator, and with the help of peer discussion, we to give them a push in the right discussion," says Debraj Dutta, member of the drama team. This method has proven to be successful, wherever applied, so far. With the help of college and school authorities, one can expect this method to take over mainstream teaching, and help students learn better.

[1] See Education, Drama and Theatre, *The Hindu*, 31st August 2019.

Schools are adopting the new educational movement, which introduced the notion of child-centered education and an integrated theory of learning. Different learning styles are considered, providing an equal opportunity for each and every kid to study and understand in his or her own unique way. This enables the educator to explore a broader and more diverse range of instructional options. Drama is a superb technique of instruction; it is "playful and enjoyable technique." It is a development of 'constructive play,' utilizing a variety of cerebral and physical activities. Indeed it can be called the most successful model of learning for developing communication skills, promoting positive self-esteem, assisting with decision-making, and increasing self-confidence, all of which are necessary for effective learning. Theatre can be easily woven and blended into all types of curriculum, age groups, languages, subjects and art forms. Drama and Teaching Math by Mark Wahl is a wonderful article in which Mark Wahl writes that "In my dreams the mathematical entities I was studying would begin to animate, Alice-in-Wonderland style, becoming people with mathematical traits"

Use of Theatre in Language Teaching

Drama encourages one to consider one's own capabilities. Engaging young English Language Learners in theatre requires them to apply their language skills by planning and organizing in teams, sharing existing drama work, focusing on their methods and accomplishments, and exchanging and discussing ideas, involving in role-play etc. Drama as an instructional tool aids in language development by expanding vocabularies, boosting fluency in oral communication, enhancing the ability to elucidate on the context of actions and words, and clearly conveying ideas and concepts. Additionally, it assists in the development of the capability to resolve issues in purposeful, unique contexts by fostering comfort with, and learning from, mistakes and trial and error, as well as the development of necessary abilities such as understanding, interpreting, and inferring when confronted with difficult material and stories. It instils a sense of enjoyment in the activities of speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Additionally, theatre aids in the transmission of a message, the development of self-awareness, the exploration of issues, and the comprehension of the significance of cooperative learning. It encourages youngsters to consider their individual or social concerns, making it much easier for them to communicate more effectively in any setting. Showcasing actual experience as well as building their own make-believe world and more significantly, learning how to influence others and put themselves in other people's shoes, are all skills that may be gained through drama. Dramatization has the capacity to empower pupils and provide several prospects for them to feel proud of their work and improve their inter-personal skills. It instils in them a sense of duty, problem-solving, leadership, and organisational abilities, as well as the ability to express themselves freely. The numerous collaboration activities help learners improve language skills and decision-making. In general, it aids in the conquering of the (in) famous "stage fright."

Role of Teachers in Using Theatre as a Learning tool

Teachers who are receptive to new ideas and have a positive attitude can successfully use theatre as a valuable teaching tool. To accomplish this, the instructor must schedule time for theatre activities into the daily timetable and plan efficiently. Teachers who employed theatre extensively in their teaching, found their pupils being incredibly confident, articulate, and competent in both subject concepts and interpersonal skills. Hence, teachers are advised to participate in theatre workshops in

order to overcome their personal inhibitions and have a better understanding of the numerous nuances of theatre in order to use it effectively as a teaching tool. The teacher can readily grasp and recognize the child based on his or her role in the theatre, their body language, their expressions, and their understanding of life scenarios they have encountered. Theatre should be made a mandatory co-scholastic activity in schools, rather than an off-time club activity in which only a few students participate. The school library should be stocked with theatre-related literature and periodicals. The administration should promote teachers to take kids to see quality plays performed by professional theatrical organizations. Regular workshops for both teachers and students should be scheduled. In the classroom, a Dramatic Society can be encouraged.

Theatre Education Today

Humanities as a stream of study has been largely marginalised in India with generations of students being coaxed by well-meaning parents to opt for the more 'respectable' Science stream. To churn out more lawyers, doctors and engineers for the nation seems to be the penultimate goal of Indian parents. Even the clerical profession will do but woe befalls the unfortunate student who finds passion in drama or design. Her/his life is doomed for sure. This notion should be discouraged and teachers should guide students into a real understanding of contemporary theatre today and the importance of following one's passion.

In colloquial parlance the term theatre is often interchangeably used with films. There is no specific difference between the two for much of India's population till today. However a coterie of educated, young theatre enthusiasts are bringing about a change in theatre studies today. One must understand that theatre studies is a carefully planned syllabus designed to train individuals to inflate life into their imagination, requiring full engagement of their mind and body. CIFE – a professional association of independent sixth-form colleges in the UK – describes the A-Level Drama course as being 'by no means a soft option'. "In Theatre, you begin with a void and create something. It requires daily rigour and practice as well as getting bored or finding yourself in a corner (metaphorically speaking usually) and using your imagination to get out of it," says veteran actress Kalki Koechlin.[2]

According to a study by Fleming and Mills (1992), the VARK model represents the various learning styles of students – Visual (V), Aural (A), Reading and writing (R) and Kinesthetic (K). Since then, there have been countless revisions of this model but one can safely say, all students do not learn in the same way. Drama is an instrument that caters creatively to VARK. One can divide the makings of a play into four parts – the script that must be written, the sound and words that must be spoken, the acting and lights finished with props and costumes that are made. Without explanation, dots can be connected between drama and VARK.

Indian cities are gradually incorporating these techniques into their education system. Organisations like Theatre Professionals in Mumbai focus on 'embedding drama-based learning' in schools across the country. Having derived scientific evidence from DICE (Drama Improves Lisbon Key Competences in Education), a two-year quantitative survey conducted in twelve EU countries analysing the efficiency of Drama in Education, *Theatre Professional*s also provide dramatic learning exercises and experiential pieces in their website to inspire educators.

Based in Bangalore Saras Priyadarshini is a Drama in Education practitioner that works in several schools in the city. Priyadarshini wants to accomplish three key goals: language improvement, moral values development, and confidence building. For the younger ones, sessions include Arithmatics

[2] See *Drama and Theatre Education in India: a Shared Journey*, Geff Readman.

and English courses conducted creatively using props and market settings. For students in eighth standard and higher, the emphasis is on developing students' English Learning, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW) skills. “At times, I encourage students to sketch an object on the board in response to directions given by a classmate, which helps students improve their listening skills,” said the teacher, who studied engineering before discovering her passion in DIE[3]. “I'm not interested in being the teacher who is obsessed with 'completing the curriculum'... Rather than that, adding some drama, interaction, and dialogue to the learning process makes it more enjoyable... When I scatter objects around the room and instruct the children to locate them, they respond with phrases such as 'on the table', 'under the chair', and so on. They have already mastered the prepositional lesson!”

Theatre as a Tool for Spreading Awareness

India boasts a plethora of legacy and culture, which is most palpable in rural India. The majority of societal ills confronting Indian society have their origins in rural India. Additionally, despite the tremendous expansion of electronic media in rural India, theatre continues to be the leading mass medium. As a result, this media plays a critical role in resolving social ills. The message being conveyed to the target audience must be well and structured. It should compel rural viewers to consider and understand the issue. Additionally, it is critical to use an acceptable mode of communication that is compatible with the audience's interests. Feedback is necessary to determine the effectiveness of theatre communication in addressing social ills.

In this area, Theatre for Development(TFD) can be a sort of participatory theatre that invites improvisation and audience participation, or it can be fully scripted and staged with the audience watching. Numerous TFD productions combine the two. Augusto Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed" is a form of community-based theatre. Since the 1970s, when the notion of Theatre for Development gained popularity, professionals and community engagement actors have utilized it in its traditional functions of public awareness, community empowerment, out-of-classroom education, entertainment, motivation, pedagogical promotion, and problem-solving for community development. TFD, as a qualitative evaluation tool, is the act of gathering and utilizing qualitative data about a community development project in order to create live performances that aid in the assessment of overall accomplishments. TFD as a tool is not only about live performances, but also about the intricate steps that lead up to them. It views audience members as co-facilitators of the entire learning process, rather than as consumers of a finished output. Generally, in TFD, audience members are not *spectators,* but *Spect-Actors* who make a significant contribution to the process's success.

Often, theatre is viewed solely as a source of amusement. However, theatre can be so much more than sparkly costumes and gorgeous music; it is frequently the ideal medium for educating audiences about contemporary social challenges and inspiring change in society.

Generally, communication consists of a sender and one or more recipients. However, unlike traditional modes of communication, theatre communications involve two or more senders. The content designed for the audience requires at least two levels of coding and decoding. Thus, the sender-I, i.e. the author of the theatre theme, should consider the comprehension levels of both participants and spectators. Theatre in education emerged in direct reaction to the demands of both theatre and schools, and has attempted to utilize the skills and inventive capacity of theatre in the

[3] Drama In Education

service of education. When combined with the aforementioned paradigm, the intended effects will be achieved.

As with any other medium, the theatre medium has a number of advantages for distributing knowledge to the public, particularly the rural masses. The majority of societal ills confronting contemporary India must be tackled in rural regions, and the ideal tool for this is theatre. The succeeding proposals may be examined for effectively using theatre to inform and educate rural populations. Municipal governments and local authorities are responsible for funding artists and promoting this medium. Street theatre has been shown to be extremely effective. As a result, appropriate motivation is sought at all ranks. All involved units at universities around the country should be assigned the responsibility of providing performances in rural areas as part of their academic curriculum. Under the National Service Scheme (NSS) at all institutions, street theatre performances aimed at teaching rural populations about social ills should be encouraged and promoted. It is obvious that theatre has faced a significant threat from numerous other media. Within this context, revolutionary new projects utilizing both theatre and new media solutions need to be developed.

Conclusion

In India, drama has indeed been utilized to highlight social injustices, advance political and social reform, and effect various societal changes. The term "theatre" in this context refers to activist and grass-roots organizations, as well as government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and socially conscious theatre companies and people. The organizations that deal with Dalits, girls, youngsters, sex workers, and other underprivileged communities all qualify as social justice theatre practitioners. The origins of a theatre dedicated to addressing social injustices may be traced back to the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), which was founded on May 25, 1943. This institution used theatre and other kinds of art to promote socioeconomic and political awareness. They were the first to incorporate traditional forms and recruit folk artists, recognizing that the people already possessed effective performing idioms. IPTA made extensive use of the advantages of theatres as a means of disseminating information in a country with poor literacy and a large population. IPTA has relied heavily on street theatre, which is a low-cost and immediate method of reaching India's illiterate. While IPTA emphasized rural performances, the Indian government supported folk artists financially and via other types of patronage. The objective was to incorporate specific social messages into their repertoires. The administration's development program was entirely centred on education, birth control, healthcare, and the construction of pit latrines, among other national concerns. Around the 1980s and 1990s, a growing number of NGOs, non-partisan activist societies, and grass-roots organizations throughout the nation chose to establish street theatre as a tool for social change.

Throughout the history of Indian theatre's attempt to address social ills, a perception has persisted that folk forms are ideally adapted to communicating with the masses. . In India, local organizations, initiatives supported by the government, and other associations such as IPTA have taken a great deal of initiative in solving societal ills. However, it may be asserted that the potential of theatre as a medium for disseminating information about societal ills has been underutilized. All stakeholders should make an initiative to boost this medium as a means of resolving social ills in indian Society and also to safeguard it from moving into oblivion.

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Annexure-II

3rd World Clean Environment Summit

Hosted by: **Department of Botany, St. Xavier's College,** Ranchi
In Association with: **International Benevolent Research Foundation (IBRF),** Kolkata
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Certificate of Participation

This is to certify that Sylee Roy
of Amity University Jharkhand
has participated and presented a paper on "Role of Tribal Women
... : An Ecofeminist Perspective."
in the "**3rd World Clean Environment Summit 2019**" held on 19-20-21 August 2019
at St. Xavier's College, Ranchi, Jharkhand.

21.8.19

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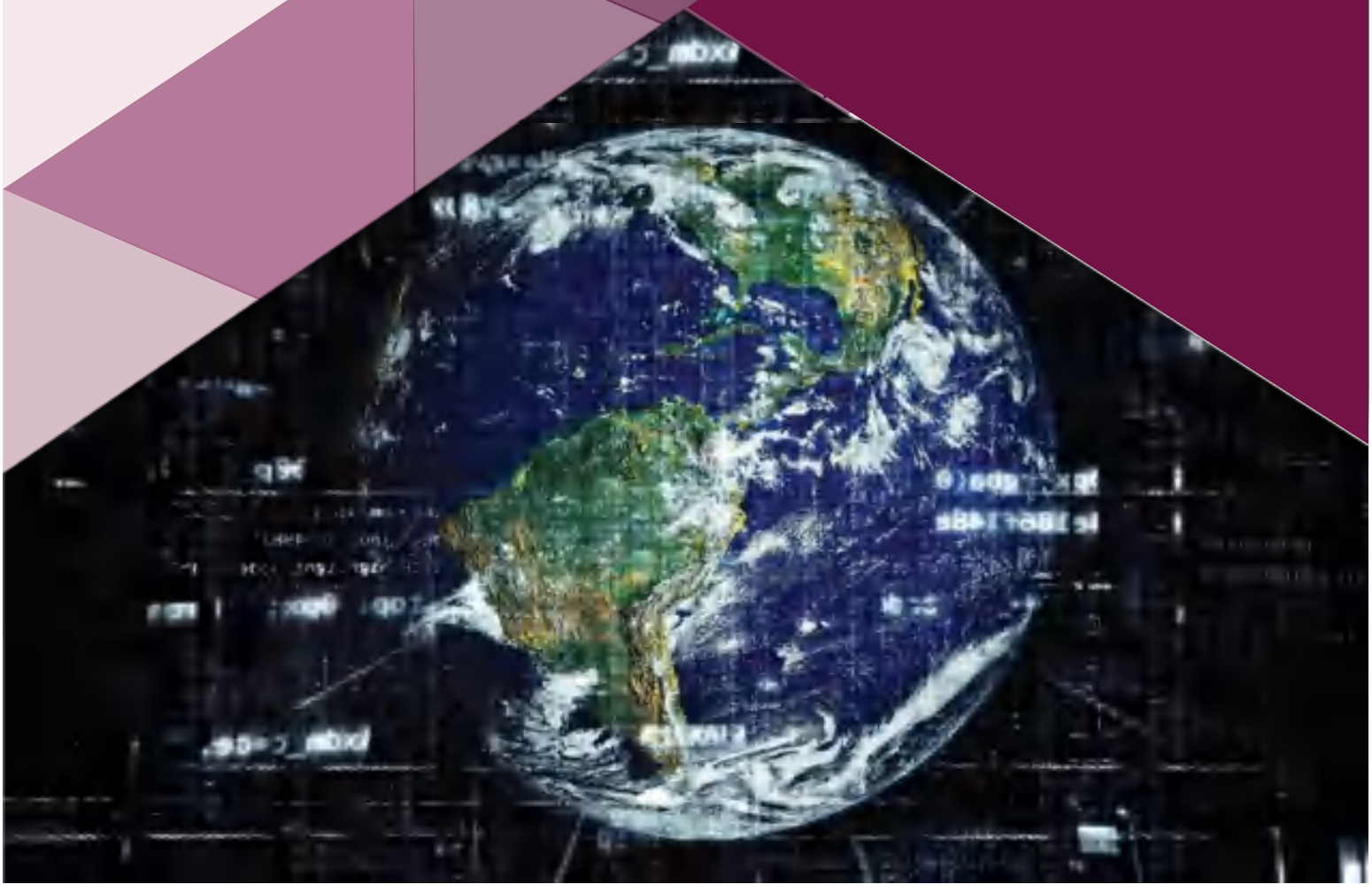

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A new theatre in the city: Fouzia Dastango and the revival of *Dastangoi*

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Abstract:
Dastangoi is an oral Urdu storytelling tradition; it has the dastango or storyteller whose voice is his main artistic tool. *Dastangoi* originated in Persia and travelled to Delhi and other parts of India, with the spread of Islam. It reached its pinnacle during the sepoy mutiny of 1857, when a number of Dastangos migrated to Lucknow, and popularized the art form in the city. Popular among all classes in Oudh, it died for a while with the demise of Mir Baqar Ali in 1928, to be only revived in 2005.The earliest reference in print is a 19th-century text chronicling the adventures of Amir Hamza titled *Dastan-e-Amir-Hamza*. Indian poet and Urdu critic Shamsur Rahman Faruqi and his nephew, writer, director Mahmood Farooqui, played significant roles in its revival in the 21st century. Buried deep in Old Delhi's decrepit homes and ancient walls are a bouquet of legends that is being revived and given a fresh lease of life by Fouzia Dastango, the first female Dastango of the country. In the staging of her art her voice and her narrative is her main tool. She does not use any audio-visual aid or music. She uses uncountable modulations to convey the nuances of human emotions and transports her audience to the world of tales. Featuring in her performances are works of Urdu writers such as Ashraf Subohi Dehelvi, Ismat Chugtai, Intizar Hussain and others. The paper thus seeks to reflect on the works of Fouzia Dastango and in the process gain valuable insights into the interconnections of this Urdu story-telling tradition from Persia with city theatre in India.

Keywords: storytelling, theater, Dastangoi