STUDY OF STREET PLAY AS A LIVING GENRE
A CASE STUDY OF INTERVENTIONS IN THE OLD CITY OF HYDERABAD

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of

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in

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by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled **"Study of Street Play as a Living Genre: A Case Study of Interventions in the Old City of Hyderabad"** submitted by me for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English to Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, is the original work carried out by me under the supervision of **Dr Gulfishaan Habeeb**, Associate Professor of English, Directorate of Distance Education, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad and the co-supervision of **Mr Rajiv Velicheti**, Associate Professor of Theatre Arts, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad. The thesis has not been submitted for any degree, diploma or other similar titles earlier, and no part of it has been published or sent for publication at the time of submission.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **"Study of Street Play as a Living Genre: A Case Study of Interventions in the Old City of Hyderabad"** submitted by **Mr D.R.P. Chandra Sekhar** for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English to Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, is the original work carried out by him under my supervision. The thesis has not been submitted for any degree, diploma, or other similar titles earlier and no part of it has been published or sent for publication at the time of submission.

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CONTENTS

Chapter One

The Marginal Streets

Origin of the Idea

The boys came back from the field, excited. They had gone to the field to perform on a street corner and were stopped in the middle of their performance by the crowd that engaged them in a challenging argument. The boys had no finesse perhaps in the rhetoric of argumentation, but they believed in the moral strength of their play. In answer to the challenging crowd, so, they repeatedly requested the crowd to watch till the end. The crowd at last relented and fell silent as the boys went on performing. The conviction of the boys proved right. The crowd sobered down at the end of the play. They appreciated the message, the performance, murmured their agreement or cynicism towards the idealism of the play. The boys felt reasonably vindicated in their conviction.

This was in what is known as the old city parts of Hyderabad where an experiment had been in the offing since 1990. This part of the city had seen communal clashes between Muslims and Hindus off and on. Each clash brought about immeasurable pain to the residents. It caused indelible scars on the lives of some families that lost their breadwinners in the mindless violence. And it is not a coincidence that it was always the poor who had to bear the brunt. The curfew that followed each clash snatched away the daily bread from a daily wage earner, from

a petty vegetable vendor, from the rag picker and from the myriad professions that depended on everyday work. The children, the sick and the old, and their caretakers suffered immensely. Soon the social workers came, armoured by their noble calling and the permission from the police, to distribute essential commodities to the queued up residents. They knew what to distribute from their past experience. The curfews came with the regularity of the seasons with uncanny predictability. Whenever there was tussle for power in the State Government, the social workers could predict that there would be riots. They knew that riots would be orchestrated to topple a government. The middle and rich classes knew when to hoard commodities and stay put at home. In the days preceding the riots and the curfew, a discerning eye saw unusually large crowds at big and small provision stores, petrol bunks, bakeries and vegetable markets purchasing larger than usual quantities. You never know when the powers that be reach a compromise in the sharing of their booty and allow the common citizens to live their normal lives.

At least a few social workers thought this could change. A remote power centre holding the common citizen to ransom for its own selfish ends could not be brooked. The common citizen could no longer remain a pawn in the power play. She had to become a self-conscious subject. Nursing one's conscience with distributing goods to the needy could not change things. The riots could no longer resemble the inevitable natural calamities. The victims did have high stakes in refusing to allow such man-made calamities from happening. From this realisation came a concrete Communal Harmony project from the Deccan Development Society. The project simply aimed at preventing riots from happening in the first

place. In coordination with local community based organisations – youth associations, women's associations, and welfare-committees – the project started working on the consciousness of the citizenry. The project soon evolved into a Confederation of Voluntary Associations popularly known as COVA. COVA aimed to build bridges between the two major communities by making them politically aware of how different vested interests played havoc with their lives, depriving them of their basic citizenship rights, creating conflicts on the basis of superficial differences in religious practices and belief systems. Part of their programme plan, borne out of their study of the socio-economic conditions of these troubled parts of the city, was to work on improving the economic lot of the slum-dwellers. This economic project, which included a cooperative of self-help groups and another cooperative to train them in traditional crafts, also creatively dovetailed the communal harmony aspect by involving women from both the communities into each self-help group and into every programme. Another part of COVA's programme plan was to more directly create awareness through talks and sports in schools and colleges, busting myths and stereotypes surrounding the conception of each community about the other, exposing the conspiracies of political and religious leaders. It is as part of this direct awareness building that COVA used street play as a medium of communication through its organ, Koshish Theatre Group.

This researcher had the privilege of working full-time closely with COVA, initially motivated by his own livelihood needs and gradually by the infectious passion of its leaders and paid workers and innumerable unpaid volunteers. He witnessed not only the excitement of the boys who performed in the street corners,

schools and colleges, but also the wide-eyed and thought-filled responses of the crowds that watched their performance. Transformation may be an exaggerated description of what happened, but the seeds for transformation were most certainly sown in the minds of all those who watched such performances. It was during this time that the idea of researching on street play was conceived.

The researcher has also for long been interested in political theatre and studied British political drama with particular emphasis on a single playwright, Howard Brenton. He had submitted a dissertation on Brenton's plays for the degree of master of philosophy. His current interest in street theatre closer home is a continuation of his broad interest in political theatre. Though street theatre has been of late used for non-political issues, it is through the groups which adopted this form for political propaganda in the larger sense that the non-political groups came to use it, albeit with limited results.

The current chapter will establish first the research context and rationale for the study with regard to street theatre, defines the study's objectives, reviews the literature on various aspects concerned with street theatre, introduces the methodology to be adopted in the study, and outlines the rest of the thesis.

The Research Context

The term street theatre conjures up various images in the mind of an average spectator in India – its contemporary image is that of an art form used by the Left to propagate its ideology among the poor; by the NGOs and the government to

create awareness on an issue such as literacy; that its target audience do not belong above lower middle class; that its primary purpose is not entertainment; that it does not seek to, since it cannot, create a realistic illusion; that it is an inferior form of art; that it has to go to, rather than draw, audience owing to the lack of popular demand for such performance, and so on. All these images that the term 'street theatre' triggers highlight its marginality in the current cultural milieu. Even when it is embraced by some practitioners and witnessed by some spectators, who may not be its intended audience, it seems both the performance and the watching is done through a sense of condescendence and tolerance. From the practitioner's viewpoint, it is as though an adult would indulge a child's play or perhaps more correctly an adult would accept the employment of a simple mode of explaining a concept to a child. The employment of street theatre is, more often than not, only for didactic purposes. The performance assumes certain ignorance on the part of the audience and then seeks to remove that ignorance.

In spite of these perceived images, the genre of street play survives even the modern electronic genres. That it is still practised and patronised, however sporadically, is testified in the examples in the international and national scenario that we come across in the following chapters.

Among the genres of literature, 'street play' is a sub-genre of theatre. While it shares certain characteristics such as a plot, story, action and characters with traditional proscenium theatre, it is distinguished by its minimalist properties, lack of distance from the audience by avoiding an elevated stage and curtains, and by assuming audience to be part of the performance. One of the advantages of street

theatre is its accessibility in terms of application to the population that has no resources. Very few props are needed for performance; no auditorium is required and no publicity is necessary. All it needs is a committed and reasonably trained team of artistes who can put up with any noisy corner of a street as the venue and any passerby, be it the beggar or a vagrant or a rag picker or a woman on her way to shopping, as its audience.

However, the street play as practised in the twentieth century is deeply political in its content, though it borrowed freely from the ancient and folk theatres of India. The Independence movement and more specifically the cultural propaganda of the Communist Party revived many folk art forms replacing their traditional content of legends, folklore and mythology with current political and economic issues simplified for the conscientization of the masses.

There have been a few attempts to document its practice, but many practices in this tradition appear to remain undocumented. As Nandi Bhatia observes:

> [The] expanding corpus of critical work on Indian theatre is important for several reasons. First, it indicates a growing interest in Indian theatre history and points towards the need for more work that subjects this highly pluralistic and diverse field to critical scrutiny. Second, it emphasizes the political side of theatre that has received insufficient attention as compared to its aesthetic dimensions, highlighting modern Indian theatre as a terrain that has the potential to question and contest authoritarian structures

> through the use of aesthetic forms that have been creatively altered (2013, p. xii).

Further, it is significant that many theatre historians (cf. Aparna Dharwadker, Vasudha Dalmia) did not pay enough attention to street theatre except for an occasional sympathetic nod. Even when practitioners and ideologues of street theatre surveyed street theatre scenario their perspective appears to be confined by their ideology. For instance, Sudhanva's Deshpande's survey of street theatre in India (*Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, Issue 16, December 1997) praises the street theatre of a particular group, Praja Natya Mandali, in Andhra Pradesh, but does not even mention the arguably much more effective street plays of Jana Natya Mandali. While the former is an affiliate of 'the official Left' with which Deshpande may have sympathies, the latter was a cultural front of the banned Maoist party.

However, that the dearth of scholarship on street theatre has been recognised is evident from the following statement of Bhatia:

> On the one hand, since the later nineteenth century, theatre has remained central to social and political movements through anti-colonial plays that were subjected to censorship under the Dramatic Performances Act of 1876. It was also an important forum for progressive writers and political activists in the early twentieth century in many regions and has helped raised concerns in post-colonial India through institutions such as the National School of Drama (NSD) as well as through the efforts of fringe

> movements in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s onwards. *This is true especially of street theatre.* The thematic range of modern theatre includes the politics of the British Raj, conditions prevalent on tea and indigo plantations, workers' rights, famines, the 1947 Partition, psychosocial fragmentation, familial problems, and the rights of Dalits, among other issues. These wide-ranging concerns have been addressed in a number of creative ways including mythological dramas, folk forms and rituals, historical revivals, transformed versions of Euro-American plays, notably of Shakespeare and Brecht, and through avant-garde experimentation. On the other hand, within the expanding corpus of literary criticism on the literatures of India, it remains the genre that has received the least amount of critical attention" (Ibid. xiii-xiv – emphasis mine).

Hence the current study seeks to unravel some issues concerning the practice or theory of street theatre as well as documenting the organised efforts in using it as a powerful medium to propagate certain ideologies or to create awareness about topical issues of the day. It treats street theatre as a living genre taking as a case study the social interventions made in the old city of Hyderabad through the medium of street theatre. It seeks to discuss how the impact of these interventions may be enhanced *vis-a-vis* the issues that they seek to address. For this purpose, this study attempts to locate this practice in the international, national and regional contexts, wherein street theatre has been used for similar purposes. In this process the study examines the genre of street play itself, its evolution from ancient times in various parts of the world and its current status and relevance as an art-form to

the contemporary society, by analysing the socio-political conditions that gave rise to its emergence and ensured its sustenance and active practice.

By documenting the efforts of a group, this research study seeks to encourage the efforts of a similar group which may improvise on the past experience and apply the genre for its awareness building exercise. Also by understanding the origins of the genre, one may be expected to provide the right ingredients for it to be more communicative and thus more effective. Since the application of street theatre, compared to even other forms of theatre, in this electronic era, is sporadic in this country, and sustained documentation (except for newspaper reports) is even less, the need for documentary analysis of even a single group like Koshish has provided the rationale for this study.

Objectives of the Study

To summarise the comments above on the research context, against the background of previous research at the national and international level and with the help of analysis of primary sources, the current research work aspires to fulfil the following objectives:

1. To examine the current status and relevance of the street play and establish it as a living genre committed to the expression of dissent in any society
2. To document and locate the street theatre practice by Koshish Theatre Group in the old city of Hyderabad in the regional, national and international historical context of the society and the genre

3. To suggest effective street theatre practices for Koshish Theatre Group for enhancing its impact in the context of communalism and religious fundamentalism

Pre-modern Forms of Street Play in India

Street play is considered a sub-genre of drama in both the Indian and Western poetics, though what these two traditions meant by the term are not exactly the same. Before delineating the specific modern form of street play in India with which this thesis is concerned, a description of its antecedents in the Indian literary traditions may not be out of place here, since, as will be discussed later, the modern form of street theatre traces its prototypical elements to similar art forms in the Indian traditions.

"*Veedhi*" is one of the ten major theatrical forms identified by Bharata[1] and later systematized by Dhananjaya[2]. Tracing the origin of the modern form in the antiquity, Prasada Reddy[3] identifies four types of street performances: (1) the Sanskrit dramatic type, *Veedhi*, (2) the mythological musical, *Veedhi Natakam*, (3)

[1] The oldest extant treatise on dance and theatre-craft *Natyasastra* is attributed to the authorship of Bharata. His date is much debated (second century BC to fourth century AD) (Source: Lal, Ananda. *Theatres of India: A Concise Companion.* New Delhi: OUP, 2009, p.316)

[2] Dhanunjaya's *Dasarupa* considered to belong to the tenth century AD, accomplishes what Bharata had planned in his *Natyasastra*, by elaborating on the ten types of drama available in practice in its time. (Source: Devy, G.N. *Indian Literary Criticism: Theory and Interpretation.* Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2012, p.41.)

[3] G.S. Prasada Reddy's doctoral thesis on "Modern Street Theatre in Andhra Pradesh: A Study" is perhaps the first scholarly attempt in India to document the history, evolution and contemporary practice of street theatre. As its title suggests the thesis focussed more on the history and practice of this art form in the undivided State of Andhra Pradesh, though it mentions the significant contributions to street theatre elsewhere in India. He discusses the origin and development of the modern Telugu Street Theatre categorising the attempts in this art form under Early Trials, the Age of Experimentation and the Stage of Consolidation. Reddy's exhaustive treatment of the subject covers a detailed discussion of the mention of *Veedhi* in Sanskrit poetics as the possible antecedent of the modern street play, as it is practiced in India and more specifically in the undivided State of Andhra Pradesh.

the political musical, *Veedhi Bhagavatham* (especially of the IPTA type) and the modern street play. He identifies the following common features: Street as the performance place, and use of narration, song, mime, dance and music – a stylized performance. In spite of these common features he finds that the Sanskrit *Veedhi* (as depicted for example in *Kreedabhiramam*) was totally different from the traditional Telugu Street Theatre, whose origin he finds in "*Bayalata*" (literally 'performance in the open') once popular in the Rayalaseema region of the present Andhra Pradesh since late 16th century or early 17th century, popularised as part of the Bhakti movement. Its relation to the *Veedhi Natakam* practised during the nationalist movement can be clearly seen because in its original form it is still prevalent in Melattur, Sulamanpalem, Uttakadu and Devapperumallu in Tamilnadu (Prasada Reddy 15). Other sources like Mukhopadhyay also testify to the similarity of *Veedhi Natakam* to *Therukuttu* of Tamilnadu.

> 'Theru' in Tamil means street, and 'kuttu' means a play, a performance. *Therukuttu* means a street play or street performance. It is worth noting here that plays were performed in the open. Forms similar to *Therukuttu* exist in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. In Andhra, it is called *Veedhi Natakam* which means the same things as Therukuttu and in Karnataka it is called *Yaskshagana*. The language used in all these variant forms is still poetry. But in *Therukuttu* what is sung is explained, expatiated and discussed in easy colloquial prose. It is taking theatre to the people instead of people going to the theatre (Mukhopadhyay 123).

In line with these observations, Darius L. Swann traces the practice of *Veedhi Natakam* in Telugu to as far as the twelfth century:

> Like Terukkuttu in Tamilnadu and the Bayalatta of Kannada, it is an open-air show which may date back as far as the twelfth century. In the course of their development these plays may have been influenced in content by the Vira Saivite cult and in style by the Kuchipudi Brahman Bhagavathars. Stories from Siva legends and the Puranic tales make the content.
>
> During the period of the Vijayanagar empire (1336-1565) Veethi Nataka performers appear to have had royal patronage. After the decline of that empire in the sixteenth century, performers migrated south to Tanjore and Madhura where, under the influence of Yakshagana, veethi nataka was given a new orientation and blossomed in the seventeenth century.
>
> Originally veethi nataka was characterised by dialogue, action, and costume, but under the influence of the Tanjore kings who became its patrons it became a kind of musical drama. While the early plays were religious in subject matter, the later plays used many secular themes. Romance, satiric comedy, and farcical events from contemporary life became common features. Veethi nataka plays are full of poetic verse and songs of great metrical variety; they also make use of dance in performance (246).

Remarking on the origins of street theatre, Jacob Scrampickal has this to say:

> Street theatre is in fact the continuation of folk theatre...The traditional folk theatres owe their origin to the streets, fields or temple courtyards. India is an ‘open air society’ with a warm climate most of the year. It is reasonable to suppose that open air performances, being cheaper and more participative, were encouraged even from the earliest of times (102).

There is no doubt that there were indigenous forms existing in India as precursors to the modern street theatre forms. It is the resemblance in form between the pre-modern and modern forms that must have connected the modern street theatre immediately to people. Introducing Genre Theory, Daniel Chandler says, “From the point of view of the producers of texts within a genre, an advantage of genres is that they can rely on readers already having knowledge and expectations about works within a genre...Genres can thus be seen as a kind of shorthand serving to increase the 'efficiency' of communication (6). It is this facility that Indian Peoples’ Theatre Association (IPTA), an organisation which pioneered in modern street theatre, used strategically, when it was reaching out to people with a message that was radically different in ideology and in content from any worldview or social theory such as the nationalism propagated by the Indian National Congress, that the masses had been familiar with, or even more radically differently from the mythological content, with which they had been more familiar.

Revival in the Modern Times

The revival of street theatre in India is sometimes attributed to the Independence movement. The creation of powerful cultural symbols like Ganesh festival by Tilak, Gandhi's marches, prayer meetings and use of Swadeshi is seen as an influence of street theatre since these 'spectacles' share some characteristics with street theatre. Scrampickal observes, "One of the first examples of street theatre is perhaps Gandhi's Salt March at Dandi (1930). It contained elements normally associated with street theatre" (102). However, almost by consensus among scholars, street theatre in its modern avatar, especially in its thematic concerns, owes its existence to Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) founded in 1943 which gave a call to artists to use traditional popular theatre and narrative to propagate the causes of people (Ibid. 102).

The first IPTA conference was held on 25 May 1943 in Bombay chaired by Prof. Heeren Mukherjee. Convened under the aegis of the Communist Party of India, IPTA had, as its founding members, personalities such as Mulk Raj Anand, KA Abbas, Balraj Sahni, Mama Warerkar, KPG Numbudri, Sajjad Jahir and Garikapati Raja Rao. The resolution passed in this first conference also laid stress on the use of traditional forms for bringing home the message of anti-fascism. Between 1943-1952 during which time it survived in its original national form, IPTA was able to reflect contemporary happenings in its diverse performances across the country, achieve a close liaison between writers and workers, become a vehicle of agitprop literature and respond to the rising aspirations of common

people and revived the folk performing art forms and infuse into them the progressive ideological content (Pradhan 354-356).

Prasada Reddy discusses in detail the achievement of Andhra Praja Natya Mandali, an offshoot of IPTA, in the practice of traditional folk forms like *Veedhi Bhagavatham* and *Burrakatha* (45). Similarly, Jayaprabha in her *Nalugo Goda* (The Fourth Wall – 1992) refers to the important role that street theatre played in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh as a form adopted from people by political-cultural institutions of Andhra Praja Natya Mandali (APNM) and Jana Natya Mandali (JNM). While the former was affiliated to the parliamentary party of Communist Party of India (Marxist), the latter is widely known as a front organisation of a Marxist Leninist party which has been working underground almost since its inception in 1968 (Jayaprabha 185).

In her analysis of IPTA's pioneering efforts, Nandi Bhatia remarks on how the organisation adapted indigenous forms to modern concerns: "In order to seek the "widest possible mass basis for its activities," the IPTA turned to indigenous popular traditions of different regions such as the *jatra* of Bengal, *tamasha* of Maharashtra, and *burrakatha* of Andhra Pradesh" (2004, p.77). She also traces the long tradition of engagement of dramatic performance with current political debates. In her in-depth study of theatre and politics in colonial and post-colonial India, she chronicles how women's struggles are being brought to the streets in postcolonial India through the form of street theatre by organizations such as Jagori, Stree Mukti Sanghathan (Maharashtra), Garib Dongari Sanghathan of

Pune, Theatre Union and Saheli of Delhi. She closely analyses the performances of some of these women's theatre groups (111-119).

Characteristics of the Genre

Prasada Reddy describes the form of Modern Street Theatre under the broad categories of General Characteristics (such as mobility, portability, inexpensiveness, flexibility, and agitprop nature inspired by international influences such as that of theatre practitioners in the Soviet Union, Germany, Latin America and Africa), Modern Street Theatre as publicity theatre (spatial and temporal features such as open air performances, arena stage, day time performances, short duration), dramatic elements (episodic structure, use of language, total theatre, use of symbolic and neutral costumes), acting techniques in the Arena Performance (mime and body language, improvisation), musical and narrative techniques (use of folk elements, use of traditional characters like *Sutradhara*, *Nati* and *Vidushaka*), and topicality and its impact (projection of contemporary problems, audience participation and intimacy with audience, feedback and public opinion. In the light of such characterisation, he identifies its similarities and dissimilarities with the traditional street theatre. Further, he discusses the themes dealt (political themes, social themes, street plays on economic conditions, educational/institutional street plays, and street plays for publicity/propaganda), and techniques (narrative models: *Sutradhara/Prayokta*, use of a traditional folk form, song, game as a form, total theatre techniques such as grouping, balancing, freeze, montage, entries and exits, dissolve and use of human props, directorial aspects such as use of dance and music). Reddy

identifies the major characteristics that signify the playwriting techniques and suggests techniques that should be mastered by actors and directors in street theatre (245-247). It may be useful to mention in this context that a street play typically downplays the authority of a script. This is a reason why one does not find a 'great' street playwright as in conventional drama. The script is normally considered a collective effort of the performing team.

Scrampickal also identifies the general characteristics of street plays such as collective authorship, living newspaper theatre techniques, and flexibility, and finds continuity of folk tradition in the genre of street play. Aspects such as audience participation, mime, costumes, make-up and masks, stage preliminaries, *sutradhar* and *vidushak*, songs, slogans and other histrionics, dance, use of imagery and symbols, satire and humour are that which contribute to the continuity of folk tradition according to Scrampickal (129-139).

Jayaprabha distinguishes between the contrasting attitudes towards theatre, of Andhra Praja Natya Mandali (APNM) and Jana Natya Mandali (JNM), which have a bearing on the form of street theatre that they adopted. APNM, she opines, was directed more by the dictates of a middle class leadership whereas in JNM middle class was not in the leadership role. This difference accounted for why JNM used folk forms like *Oggukatha* and *Jalari Bhagavatham* without sharing any interest in proscenium theatre, which had been exploited by APNM (185). She even saw the use of "alienation effect" in the way the plays of JNM remove the illusion from spectators. The writer(s) of these plays, even though presumably unaware of Brecht, could achieve this effect simply by adopting the traditional

folk form of *Jalari Bhagavatham*, in which characters enter by introducing themselves through song and rhythmic dance (183).

Speaking for the Western kind, Jan Cohen-Cruz categorises street theatre into five approaches: 1) Agit-prop which involves attempts to mobilize people around partisan points of view that have been simplified and theatricalised to capture by-passers' attention directly or by way of the media. 2) Witness, in which a social act that one does not know how to change but at least acknowledge is publicly illuminated. 3) Integration, the insertion of a theatrically heightened scenario into people's everyday lives to provide an emotional experience of what might other remain distant. 4) Utopia, which is the enactment of another vision of social organization, temporarily replacing life as it is, and often performed with public participation. 5) Tradition, in which a communally shared cultural form is used bespeaking common values, beliefs and connections, to address a current concern (5).

The following characteristics of agit-prop approach to theatre, to which most street theatre practice in India also belongs, are identified by Cohen-Cruz:

i. Portable sets
ii. Visually clear characterizations
iii. Emblematic costumes and props
iv. Choral speaking
v. Traditional music

vi. Character types familiar to the broad range of spectators that may congregate

vii. Ideological resonance with the public spaces/buildings where they are presented

Further she characterises the quintessential agit-prop as short in length and broad in concept, sharpening class differences and simplifying class warfare into a battle between an idealistic worker protagonist and top-hatted, cigar-smoking capitalist antagonist (13).

Remarking in the context of Welfare State International, a British street theatre group, Baz Kershaw argues that agit-prop does not suit the new pluralist societies because the counter cultures are not programmatic in their ideologies and also because it is difficult to name the enemy in such societies (208-216). But Cohen Cruz is of the opinion that agit-prop is still relevant for educational purposes around a specific issue and not necessarily for general revolution. It is also necessary that the performers should be doing what they preach. She cites Augusto Boal's theatrical techniques as an example for their eminent application even in non-revolutionary contexts (14).

Bill Mason divides the street theatre practitioners into five categories: entertainers, animators, provocateurs, communicators and performing artists based on their motives for practising street theatre (6). He analyses the different methods of stationary and mobile performance, and examines the logistics of various sizes and types of activity (Ibid. 6). He defines 'street theatre' as any (theatrical) work that

is designed for the streets. However, he observes that this term is used in Britain to describe work that may not be designed at all for the streets. Thus he finds the German word '*Openluchttheater*' more appropriate (Ibid. 7).

Mason also speaks about how innovations in theatre (brought about in the process of exploring into the possibilities of heightening the theatrical experience for the audience, but also perhaps by the necessity of differentiating itself from other media, which do similar things like creating an illusion but much more effectively) better suited the outdoor performance of a street play because of the latter's sense of uncertainty about the location, the kind of audience it may get, the distractions and the near-impossibility of pre-arrangements. For example, the emphasis on visual image and physical skills of the performers rather than on the text is necessary because it is difficult within the outdoor noises over which the performers have no control. Similarly, using minimal props is a technique evolved out of the necessity for street theatre, because the time-taking efforts of setting up elaborate stage are not compatible with the paucity of control over time and space outdoors for a street play (Ibid. 9-10).

Scrampickal distinguishes the practice of street theatre in India and the West: "Unlike its Western counterpart where there are giant puppets, stilt walkers, masquerades, large banners, placards and posters, in these street plays the emphasis is more on the performance of the actors" (99). Though his observation about the relatively greater importance given to the spectacle in the West describes a fact, one finds more similarities than differences in the two traditions in terms of thematic concerns.

Major Influential Practitioners

Though IPTA as an organisation brought together a nationwide practice of street theatre by a number of committed groups and exceptionally talented artiste-activists under a single ideological umbrella, a few practitioners and theatre groups, such as Badal Sircar's Satabdi and Hashmi's Jana Natya Manch stand out for their far-reaching influence across this vast country. Their practices have also been well-documented.

Prasada Reddy discusses the contribution of Badal Sircar's Third Theatre, Safdar Hashmi's experiments in street theatre and such activities in other parts of the country to the development of modern street theatre in India (130). Acknowledging that in taking forward the street theatre movement IPTA played a major role, initially in the practice of Utpal Dutt and Habib Tanvir – to this another pioneer Shombhu Mitra's name needs to be added – Scrampickal observes that, with Badal Sircar, 'street theatre became a force to reckon with' (105). Badal Sircar, with his theatre workshops, reached out to every nook and corner of India.

To cite an instance of Sircar's influence, Jayaprabha describes the process through which street theatre was used by Pasupuleti Purnachandra Rao, who was influenced by Badal Sircar:

1. Identify a region, study the issues there and interacting with the victims of those issues and listen to them,

2. After understanding the issue, take up the same issue (for performance) and select artists from the same community,
3. Conduct a workshop continuously for 15-20 days with those select artists and put up the play after completion of training,

> Purnachandra Rao never starts his play with a pre-written script. Himself becoming the writer and director he completes the script and performance at the same time (190-191 – *translation mine*).

[In this context, Jayaprabha records that Purnachandra Rao recognises Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed also as his one of his main inspirations. Jayaprabha also discusses in detail how Telugu Drama broke the "fourth wall" separating the performance from the audience both by reviving the traditional form of theatre and by the influence of performance theorists like Schechner (220-225).]

Jayaprabha describes "street play" as postmodern theatre distinguishing it from the modernist proscenium theatre. She identifies Badal Sircar's Third Theatre as the prime influence on experiments in Telugu street theatre, one of the pioneers of such production outside any political application being Attili Krishna Rao. Jayaprabha finds Schechner and Badal Sircar converging in their results, though both started with different aims, Schechner aiming at a postmodernist alternative and Sircar aiming to conscientize people by taking drama into their midst instead of confining it to auditoriums filled with middle class audience. Jayaprabha

concludes that both postmodernist and political theatre rejected proscenium theatre and used folk art forms creatively (271).

One can find in Arjun Ghosh's *A History of the Jana Natya Manch: Plays for the People*, a microscopic study of Janam (short for Jana Natya Manch). In GP Deshpande's words, it is a biography of Janam with a sensitive portrayal of its journey through various upheavals, the major being the assassination of one of its founders and charismatic leader, Safdar Hashmi and Ghosh's penchant "to study the strategies through which a progressive politics could intervene in the process of identity formation and mobilize people in its favour" (Ghosh 2012, xix) took him to an intensive study of the genre, and as it is practised by Janam, and Janam itself.

Arjun Ghosh also documented the use of street theatre as a medium for election campaigning, especially during the 2004 General Elections in India (Ghosh 2005). As a participant in the Janam team which produced the plays during this time and as a documentalist he records the minutiae of the production process of these plays including about the audience reception, infrastructure, content, and opposition from rival groups. Further, importantly, he distinguishes between the performances of a politically committed team like Janam, and those used by rival political parties, which he calls "performances for the establishment" carried out by freelance and (to use a modern term) outsourced teams with absolutely no political conviction in the content of their performances (2005, 180-181).

Eugene van Erven (1989) describes his direct experience of interacting with Safdar Hashmi in action and of watching Janam team perform for the workers of Delhi. He describes in detail the street play, *Machine* and *Apharan Bhaichare Ka* that he watched. In his interaction with Erven, Hashmi provides his insight into the theatre environment in India. Behind the revival of the traditional theatre and other art forms of India, Hashmi suspects the strategy of the ruling elite of keeping intact the obscurantism of the original content of these art forms. Hashmi believed in integrating the content relevant to the modern working class with indigenous forms, not as an artificial and deliberate juxtaposition, but as an organic interweaving that can only come by living within the artistic environment of the rural and urban working class. Erven also records the events leading to the founding of Janam as an offshoot of left students' movement and as an extension of IPTA, in Hashmi's own words.

The modern Indian theatre's search for its own identity, after a self-conscious review of the western influence, led it to its folk traditions especially after Independence. This exercise and its aesthetics and political concern have been painstakingly analysed and documented by Vasudha Dalmia in her *Poetics, Plays and Performances: The Politics of Modern Indian Theatre*. In the chapter entitled "To be More Brechtian is to be More Indian", Dalmia recounts the journey of Habib Tanvir to the recesses of Chattisgarh from Delhi, and how he sought to extend the urban theatre sensibility to rural, instead of showcasing the latter for the entertainment of the urban (251-277).

International Influences

Richmond et al (2007) make very interesting observations about how Brecht, Artaud and Grotowsky owe their innovative technique and treatment of drama to the inspiration of Asian Theatre. They acknowledge the contribution to the Western theatrical experiments by the Asian Theatre, the Chinese Theatre (in which the authors find many similarities with Indian Theatre's own *Nautanki* and *Tamasha*), Japanese Noh, Balinese theatre and Indian Kathakali, where the lack of dramatic illusion, and ritual, magic ('recapturing of a fundamentally religious experience'), and non-verbal communication are predominantly found (463-464).

What Brecht took from Asia in terms of technique, probably he gave it back with a new content. Some street theatre practitioners opine that even the form of street theatre in India is inspired by Brecht and others. Safdar Hashmi acknowledges that "[i]n terms of the forms street theatre is adopting, it has more in common with the tradition of theatre developed by Piscator and Brecht rather [than] with the traditional forms of theatre in India" (9).

Most street theatre practitioners, however, agree that the modern street theatre in India owes as much to the influence of the important practitioners in the West as to its own indigenous forms. As Nandi Bhatia discovers, "the Little Theatre Groups in England, the Works Progress Administration theatre project in the United States in the 1930s, the Soviet theatres, and the strolling players in China who staged antifascist plays to protest Japanese exploitation exerted tremendous influence on the IPTA" (2004, p.77).

Hashmi is categorical in his attribution of the origins of modern street theatre to the celebrations in the aftermath of October Revolution:

> On the first anniversary of the October Revolution, Vsevolod Meyerhold produced poet Vladmir Mayakovsy's (sic) *Mystery-Bouffle* in which he combined elements of circus clownery with revolutionary poetry and put it up in the city square for an audience of several thousands. Similar theatrical performances remained popular in various parts of the new workers' state for several years. This was the beginning of a new kind of agit-prop theatre performed on the streets, at factory gates, markets, dockyards, playgrounds, barnyards and so on. Avowedly political in nature, this theatre sought its audiences at their places of work or stay rather than attempting to bring them to the theatre hall...This was the route it took all over the world. In India, it emerged as a natural product of the Indian Peoples' Theatre Association's campaign to draw the masses of people into the anti-imperialist struggle (6).

In evolving his concept of the Third Theatre, Badal Sircar recounts the contribution of his and his group's experience of learning from "Anthony Serchio – a director of the La Mama theatre of USA which has contributed so much to the experimental theatre" (24). Under Serchio's guidance Sircar's group learnt basic theatre exercises known as the 'cat series' evolved by Grotowsky (Ibid. 24). When Sircar spent about a month in North America in1972, he had the opportunity of interacting with avant-garde theatre groups like the Living Theatre,

the Firehouse Theatre and The Performance Group. Commenting on the Living Theatre, Sircar remarks: “The Living Theatre is openly and frankly political. The politics, however, is not what is commonly found in propaganda and poster plays but have more to do with basic political philosophy, with man’s consciousness and responsibility. I did not realize at that time but, later, the sole purpose of my theatre was to become almost exactly that, although my philosophy as well as my theatre differed considerably from that of the Living Theatre” (Ibid.26). Similarly, he was impressed by the rigour of Richard Schechner’s group, The Performance Group. In his words: “Though short, my stay in America and my contact with the people of the new theatre there drove at least one important point home – that theatre cannot be done without intense training” (Ibid.29). His earlier tour, in 1966, of the USSR, Poland and Czechoslovakia on a Cultural Exchange Programme, also exposed him to other avant-garde productions and philosophies of theatre active in those parts of the world at that time. What captivated him in the midst of this rich experience was especially “the concept of the Poor Theatre” of Grotowsky, which Sircar was later to adapt to his own theatre practice (Ibid. 18-19).

We have seen above how street theatre practitioners in India like Purnachandra Rao acknowledge their debt to Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed (Jayaprabha 190-191). Boal’s techniques continue to influence street theatre groups like Jana Sanskriti Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed, of which we shall discuss in more detail in Chapter III.

Methodology

Art forms and genres acquire class character in a class society. This was true in the division of *Marga-Desi* genres in the ancient Indian society. So is the case with today's electronic world, wherein the means of production are in the hands of the national bourgeoisie and multinational capital – the cinema, the satellite television, the internet, the cellular phone etc. Inevitably in such a world the interests of the dominant class are sustained by the propaganda through such media and the genres that pervade these media. Just like the 'high art' was patronised by, and as such reflected the interests of, the ruling class in the ancient Indian society, today's dominant media and their genres reflect the interests of the ruling classes today. Thus street theatre remains one of the only few art forms available to the oppressed classes for reflecting on their own lives. In spite of the efforts of IPTA, the other folk forms continue to have retrogressive content that is little relevant to the contemporary reality.

To unravel the marginalization that street theatre as a genre has been battling with, the research study uses the theoretical framework offered by Karl Marx and later elaborated by thinkers like Antonio Gramsci. In their German Ideology, Marx and Engels use the metaphor of *base* and *superstructure* to describe the relationship between the relations of production of a society at a particular point of time in history and the contemporary culture, respectively. Early Marxists accepted Marx's broad metaphor somewhat mechanically and tried to interpret the cultural practice, including the art forms, as the direct reflections of the contemporary economic relations. Marxist literary critics such as Lucaks, used a more liberal

conceptualisation to practice an influential school of literary criticism. However, later Marxists, notably Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Louis Althusser, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, considerably revised the essential Marxist concepts such as ideology, and the metaphor of base and superstructure by adopting politically compatible tools from theories such as structuralism, deconstruction, and psychoanalysis. The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci introduced the term 'hegemony' to describe the effect that cultural forms had on the oppressed sections of society by their power to influence the masses through enlisting their willing participation in the ideology of the ruling sections. Raymond Williams, while analysing the concepts of base, superstructure and hegemony, in the context of reviewing Marxist cultural analysis, contributes the concepts of dominant, residual and emergent cultures to account for various strands of culture, with varying degrees of power at any given point in history. The current thesis attempts to review the evolution of the genre, 'street play' and its concerns in this theoretical framework of hegemony, residual and emergent cultures based on Williams's framework.

The researcher has used primary resources such as the performances (watched by him), the text of street plays used by the practising groups, and interviews with people who were and are directly involved in the practice. A great deal of secondary material has been used to describe the practices of this form that were removed from his direct access in terms of space and time.

The following chapter (titled 'Rehearsing for Revolution', the phrase taken from Augusto Boal for its apt summary of the intention of many international street

theatre practices) studies the origins of street theatre in the international context, from its original roots to its present day context, and a representative script will be analysed to show its current practice. The third chapter (titled 'The Right to Perform', the phrase taken from the title of Safdar Hashmi's inspiring book, for capturing the assertive response to oppressive measures of the establishment in curtailing performance of dissent in India) focuses on street theatre in the Indian context, and the specific context of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. In this chapter a few representative plays of an influential street theatre group, Jana Natya Manch known as Janam, will be analysed. Against this background, the fourth chapter (titled 'A *Koshish* for Building Bridges', uses the pun on Koshish – which means in Hindustani, an attempt - to describe the modest efforts of Koshish Theatre Group in bringing communities together for harmonious coexistence) deal with the interventions made in the old city of Hyderabad through the medium of street theatre. A brief historical account will also be given in this chapter to establish the rationale for the emergence of interventions of this kind in this particular region. The fifth chapter (titled 'Layered Hegemonies' to describe one of the main contentions of this study, which is to highlight many hegemonies operating in the context of street theatre) will analyse the data collected in the course of this study in the Marxist framework as described above and draw some lessons for the benefit of street theatre groups similar to Koshish in the contemporary Indian society.

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Chapter Two

‘Rehearsing for Revolution’

Street theatre in the modern form has evolved from the innovations and discoveries in the mainstream theatre practice itself. Dramatic art underwent several experiments throughout its history with regard to the thematic concerns, style of representation of the reality, in relationship with the audience, the technique of acting and the involvement of the actors, the use of time and space and the quality of impact that is sought to be created.

In ancient societies art was always a collective activity. As in pre-colonial Kenya, "drama was not an [...] isolated event: it was part and parcel of the rhythm of daily and seasonal life of the community. It was an activity among other activities, often drawing its energy from those other activities" (wa Thiong'o 239). With increased surplus production, occupations became more and more specialised. Performance of art became the occupation of a few while the rest of the society became its audience. However art also flowed in different streams. The art developed or patronised by more leisurely classes became 'high art' while the art that entertained the working classes became 'low art'. This class distinction among arts appears to be universally observed though in different forms – in modern times this may be a distinction between the 'mainstream art' and the 'marginal'.

In the case of Europe, it can definitely be said that the foundations of theatre itself as we see it today were laid in the streets, once it is sent out of the churches. The

mystery, miracle and morality plays produced in the fairs and streets of medieval Europe involved various trade guilds, of armourers, shipwrights, fishermen and mariners, chandlers, goldsmiths, bakers, pinners and painters, butchers and scriveners, in setting up of the pageants. Especially in England these plays with biblical themes continued to entertain people even after the Greek classics were introduced during Renaissance. "Dramatic progress is connected with the development of the fairs, the increase of wealth, the rise of the burgher class, the prosperity of corporations, and finally the emancipation of the vulgar tongue" (Legouis and Cazamian 181). The morality plays in the fifteenth century England that followed the mystery and miracle plays marked a transition from the restriction of the clergy over the biblical content (except in the comic interludes) to the modern drama with secular themes and psychological analysis of the human beings. The morality called *Everyman* is supposed to be a masterpiece of its kind in the medieval England. This form of the medieval theatre continued to actively influence the great dramatists of the Renaissance and Reformation periods, in parallel with the Greek and Roman Classics. Apart from the new direction that the dramatic themes in moralities charted, the space of theatre also underwent a change from a movable pageant to a single, unchanging stage (Ibid. 188-190).

This chapter surveys how street theatre has been practiced in countries other than India, pointing out why it had/has to be *street* theatre rather than conventional proscenium theatre, what its concerns and purposes have been in different locations, and how effective such practice has been in terms of sustenance and the reaction/response it has been receiving from various agencies such as the state, civil society and other practitioners of theatre.

Street theatre as it is practised in the twentieth century drew inspiration from certain historical events and the perspective provided by certain pre-eminent dramatists. In his influential book, *Experimental Theatre: From Stanislavsky to Peter Brook*, James Roose-Evans describes the quest for 'true theatre' carried out by masters like Constantin Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Nikolai Evreinov, Gordon Craig, Copeau, Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, Otto Brahm, Erwin Piscator, Bertolt Brecht, Peter Stein, Antonin Artaud, Nikolai Okhlopkov, Richard Schechner, Peter Brook and others. To connect their work to the concerns of this study is to truly embark on a different study altogether – suffice it to say that they were all, in their radically different ways, concerned with making their performance closer to the spectator. Most of these masters would agree with Nikolai Okhlopkov: "We are trying to create an intimacy with the audience [he told Lee Strasberg in 1934], and with this in mind we surround the audience from all sides – we are in front of the spectator, at his side, above him, and even under him. The audience of our theatre must become an active part of the performance" (Qtd. in Roose-Evans, Location 1384). It is in this kind of concern that street theatre can be said to have drawn inspiration from these masters.

If the formation of the USSR after the October Revolution and the anti-Vietnam War protests in the 1960s were specific and concrete historical incidents that gave enthusiastic boost to this genre, the intense processes of anti-colonial struggles in erstwhile European colonies in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and universal economic upheavals have all contributed to its growth, precisely because of its accessibility to the masses, who do not visit theatres, and because of its flexibility

in involving its spectators into its action. At the risk of oversimplification, we may venture to attribute the genre's prominence to individuals like Brecht and Boal. (Naming individuals is more of convenience, a sort of shortcut. This is not to undermine the role of a particular ethos and traditions in the facilitation of the contributions of such individuals.)

Two Historic Moments

The October Revolution in 1917 inspired several activists world over. Immediately after the successful overthrow of the Tsarist regime, the Soviet government under Lenin's leadership organised massive celebrations that were very consciously aimed at including the masses in these celebrations by many theatrical events on the streets of Moscow with symbolic representations of the ideas and personalities of the old feudal and bourgeois class and those of the revolutionaries enacting events and pageants of the victory of the socialist revolution (Cohen-Cruz 15-25).

In the initial years of socialist regime in the erstwhile USSR, *agitprop* street theatre was a popular medium for initiating the masses into the new socialist culture. The new regime under Lenin actively encouraged such use of an artistic genre for propaganda of the socialist ideology. However, in the decades following Lenin's death the successive governments in the USSR strongly discouraged any such form, especially if it was a critique of the functioning of the government. The totalitarian state suppressed any open dissent. This was to continue till late 1980s when there was increasing clamour for the end of the totalitarian state that brooked

no plurality of voices. It was during this period before *glasnost* that a clown group by name Licidei started working through street theatre, voicing its dissent with the powerful establishment (Mason 69). Its strong opposition to the state ensured that it remained underground until drastic reforms took place in the political ideology of the state, when Licidei was able to organise huge outdoor shows under a more liberal regime. They opposed war and violence and the disastrous effects of nuclear power (such as in Chernobyl) and dealt with these themes with an underlying message for peace (Ibid. 69).

The May 1968 student uprising in France made use of street theatre to convey a sense of liberated future. In a context where the cultural moguls, the popular media being in the hands of the ruling class, have a monopoly on mass communication, the only weapon in the hands of the students who wanted the exploitative political and economic system to end was street theatre (Lebel 180). At the height of the revolution in 1968, the burning of effigies of de Gaulle and other political leaders, surrounded by short skits betrayed a legacy of the 'carnival', a mass celebration, where social hierarchies were made topsy-turvy, where the deepest desires of liberation were integrated with reality through a realization of the power of the streets. The short-lived utopian celebration nevertheless left an indelible mark not just on the French population but across the world leaving in its trail a whole lot of beginning of new revolutions. Here is a firsthand account of this brief historic celebration on the streets of Paris in May 1968:

> ...human relations were freer and much more open; taboos, self-censorship, and authoritarian hang-ups disappeared; roles were permutated; new social combinations were tried out. Desire was no longer negated but openly expressed in its wildest and most radical forms. Slavery was abolished in its greatest stranglehold: people's heads. Self-management and self-government were in the air and, in some instances, actually worked out. The subconscious needs of the people began to break through the ever present network of repressive institutions which is the backbone of capitalism. Everywhere people danced and trembled. Everywhere people wrote on the walls of the city or communicated freely with total strangers. There were no longer any strangers, but brothers, very alive, very present....The first things revolutions do away with are sadness and boredom and the alienation of the body.
>
> Street theatre as such started to pop up here and there in mass demonstrations, such as the 13th of May, which gathered more than a million people (Lebel 181).

Forty students from Vincennes University, with no experience in theatre, nor having witnessed any political street theatre – though the Living Theatre, German SDS in Frankfurt, and other groups in London, New York, Rome and San Francisco had already been practising the form in Europe – still attempted their hand at it, not out of their artistic zeal but out of their urgency to communicate to people on the street what they envisaged for the country and its people (Lebel 182). Creating archetypal characters, of the revolutionary, the imperialist US, the

bureaucrat, and the army officer, emphasising spectacle rather than dialogue, equipped with slogans on placards, prepared for a dialogue with the audience, determined to resist the force of the anti-riot police, the students put up the two-minute long shows – followed by hour-long discussions with bystanders – in subway stations and streets. As revolution was in the air, the reception especially by the working class in the audience was instantaneous and enthusiastic. The audience used the occasion to discuss issues such as 'reform vs. revolution', and to share their own sense of alienation in their respective workplaces. They cheered the performers by shouting slogans in support of workers' councils and libertarian socialism (Ibid. 183-184).

Transcending Brecht

Though in making theatre a political weapon Brecht was a major influence on many street theatre activists who sprang during 1960s in Europe, in going all out into the masses they surpassed him 'seeking a more direct form of theatrical activism' (Cohen-Cruz 7). Peter Handke argues that in spite of his commitment to the working class, to exposing the systemic injustice and to effectively establishing among the audience the realization that reality is within their capacity to change, Brecht was still operating in the conventional mode of entertaining his audience within a safe enclosure; on the other hand it was groups like Berliner Kommune who went in to the streets, where their intended audiences were and performed for them (Handke 8). Moreover, like conventional dramatists Brecht set out to provide a 'reassuring' solution at the end his problem plays (Handke 9). Such assurances, according to Handke, are false.

Roose-Evans in a similar vein comments: “The tragedy of Brecht’s life boils down to this simple fact: he gained the admiration and respect of those whom he professed to despise – the poets, the intellectuals, the West; and he failed to gain the one audience in the world for whom he claimed to write: the working class, the party, the East” (Locations 1244, 1250).

This is of course not to underplay the influence of Brecht, but only to see, standing on his shoulders, so to speak, how his successors carried forward his legacy of ‘people’s theatre’.

Latin America

Because of its purpose and design for becoming accessible to the spectator in a way the proscenium theatre with its imaginary ‘fourth wall’ cannot, street theatre is increasingly being referred as ‘participatory theatre’. (It is not uncommon to find this new phrase in the parlance of international non-governmental organisations and their partner NGOs in many developing countries.) Though the connotation of ‘participatory theatre’ is not as much political as that of ‘street theatre’, the commonness, of course, is their participatory nature.

Brazil’s contribution to this kind of theatre is a milestone in the theatre history of the world itself. While Augusto Boal is the one who greatly contributed to this history by his Theatre of Oppressed, one cannot ignore the contribution of Paulo Freire in the field of education that greatly influenced Boal’s own vision (Search

for Common Good). Paulo Freire was a Brazilian lawyer and educationist who developed his ideas on Pedagogy of the Oppressed in response to the violation of the rights of his fellow citizens who were in dire need of education about their own ability to change their lives. Exposed to the 'hungry thirties' Freire knew the pathos of the oppressed classes firsthand. Though trained for practising law, he made it his mission to contribute to the field of education early in his career (Ibid.). Freire observed that the education as it is practised today assumes that pupils are mere empty cans meant to receive educational inputs from their teachers. As a result of this widely held assumption, pupils are deprived of opportunities to look at their reality critically by the pressure of hierarchy imposed on them by the system. According to Freire, such education can never be relevant to the pupils in their lives in the sense that it can help them take charge of their lives without accepting any other's definition being imposed on them (Ibid.). Such education can have a very dangerous effect especially on the oppressed classes of society, because they are the ones who are in actual need of changing their lives. Apart from the content of education such people receive in this system, the mechanism itself ensures that they remain uncritical of the status quo. Freire's deep conviction in the capacities of every human individual in learning to be critical and take intelligent decisions about oneself and one's society, led him to develop his methodology of learning process, widely known today in Freire's own term, the 'pedagogy of the oppressed'. His model radically democratised the learning system, in which the teacher's role is reduced to that of a facilitator rather than an all-knowing master. The facilitator is to ensure that a democratic dialogue happens among the learners through which they get into the business of educating themselves. Freire proposed that only such education helps the pupils to apply the

acquired knowledge actively in their lives (Ibid.). He applied his methodology first in his literacy projects among the largely illiterate rural population of Brazil. Though he was remarkably successful in his efforts, since his methodology involved not just literacy but also conscientization, the military dictatorship which took over the country in 1964 considered him a threat and exiled him. Much like Boal but preceding him Freire had to find his first patrons and admirers away from his homeland until he returned in 1980 with a democratic government returning to power in Brazil.

There are many parallels between Freire's work in education and Augusto Boal's work in theatre. Augusto Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed' brought street theatre further political significance by making 'spectators' into 'actors'. He coined the term 'spect-actors' to describe the audience thus transformed. For Boal, theatre is a tool for social change. Against preaching to the 'ignorant' masses, he believed that they are capable of analytical thinking and can become change agents of their own oppressed lives. What is required is raising their consciousness about their own power. Trained in theatre at Columbia University, USA, he went back to his native Brazil and started with Arena Theatre. His leftist nationalist leanings in theatre practice angered the military dictatorship, which came to power through a coup in 1964. He was exiled to Argentina as a result in 1971 "along with Celso, Veloso, and many other noted artists in the neighboring years" (Britton 17). It was during his fifteen years of exile in Peru and Argentina that he developed his thoughts on 'Theatre of the Oppressed' (TO), which clearly indicates the influence of his fellow Brazilian and friend Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed. He conducted several influential workshops in the US and Europe based on TO. After

a democratic government came to power in Brazil he came back to his native land to establish the Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed and practise different techniques of theatre such as Invisible Theatre, Image Theatre, Forum Theatre and Legislative Theatre. After he was elected as one of the City Councillors of Rio De Janeiro, he and his team actively practised what is called Legislative Theatre, in which voters become legislators, just as spectators become actors (Heritage 25-34).

Though in common with and influenced by Brecht, Boal clearly saw the political potential of theatre, in conscientising the audience Boal went a step further than Brecht by erasing the boundaries of life and art and by actively involving audience (who of course need to be the community whose problem is being dramatised) and inviting them to replace actors playing any of the roles in the play and turn it the way they want towards a solution acceptable to the majority.

Theatre is 'rehearsing for revolution' according to Boal. Though every movement may rehearse for the final moment of confrontation with the establishment it is protesting against, the difference in Boal is this: "Theatre of the Oppressed expands the role of rehearsal to help people at any level of political commitment not only to rehearse direct confrontation with the state but to use improvisatory performance to decide what their problems are, what they want, and what they are able to do about" (Bogad 49).

'Invisible theatre', a formal variation in street theatre was born out of the conviction of theatre practitioners – who are also political activists – that mere demonstrations include only the converted and serve the purpose of show of

strength. They believed that the conventional political theatre has become impotent in influencing its audience. But an important achievement would be to change the opinion of those who witness and occasionally take part in the show. Of course in 'invisible theatre' the audience are unaware they are witnessing, or participating in, a deliberately and very carefully planned drama in their midst. The credit of popularising this form goes to Boal. Describing the pre-conditions for 'invisible theatre', Boal says:

> *Invisible theatre*...consists of the presentation of a scene in an environment other than the theatre, before people who are not spectators. The place can be a restaurant, a sidewalk, a market, a train, a line of people, etc. The people who witness the scene are those who are there by chance. During the spectacle, these people must not have the slightest idea that it is a 'spectacle,' for this would make them 'spectators' (Boal 121 in Cohen-Cruz).

Now Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed techniques such as Forum Theatre, Invisible Theatre, Newspaper Theatre, and Image Theatre are no longer limited to Europe (where Boal himself initiated several theatre groups into TO), but they are borrowed, adapted, improvised and assimilated in many countries across the world. A training manual developed by an organisation called Search for Common Ground in the Democratic Republic of Congo, *Participatory Theatre for Conflict Transformation: Training Manual* supported by international funding agencies such as USAID (US Government agency), Sida, UNHCR and DFID (a British

government agency) lists the locations where the participatory theatre techniques developed by Boal have been in practice:

> No longer solely rooted in the politics of Brazil, participatory theatre is now widely applied in a variety of fields – from public health to education to conflict transformation – as a useful tool to reach new communities and effect positive discourse and change (Search for Common Ground).

Forum theatre is being used by the Brazilian government as a matter of routine now to rehabilitate and educate state criminals. A group called Proscenium in France now uses Forum Theatre to address issues such as drug abuse, sexual violence, domestic violence, and current political debates. In Great Britain, Theatr Fforwm Cymru uses similar techniques derived from Forum Theatre in their work of promoting emotional literacy and active citizenship in individuals and communities. Local community groups in Wales organised annual Legislative Theatre Festival to influence lawmakers. An NGO called ASHTAR uses participatory theatre techniques of Boal to stimulate cultural awareness within the Palestinian society. In several African countries, these techniques are being used in conjunction with indigenous African theatre styles for promoting sexual education and to combat the spread of AIDS, consciousness raising, and for creating an awareness on environment, human rights and education issues. Jana Sanskriti in rural West Bengal in India, Aarohan Street Theatre in Nepal are using Boal for dealing with issues of caste and religious tension, and voting rights and democracy among other topics (Search for Common Ground).

In another Latin American country, Argentina, the elderly mothers, known as a group by name 'Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo', of children 'disappeared' by the brutal dictatorship have resorted to regular, weekly, street demonstrations against the government which abducted, tortured and permanently 'disappeared' 30,000 Argentineans between 1976 and 1983. In spite of severe repression facing them, the courageous women returned to the central square of Buenos Aires, Plaza de Mayo, every Thursday wearing white scarves and carrying pictures of their 'disappeared' children, thus making themselves visible as protesters with a heartrending cause, of seeking the whereabouts of their children. The cause was able to attract solidarity not only across Argentina and Latin America, but across the world. In spite of the ushering in of a democratic government in Argentina, the mothers still wait for an answer to their query, still continuing with their 'street show', which renders the act as political as any street theatre can be, albeit with no desire on the part of the mothers for any power for themselves (Taylor 74-85).

Africa

In different post-colonial African societies such as Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Nigeria, Malawi, and Lesotho, there proliferated community based Theatre Development Projects, which attempted to revive the traditional ritual-based cultural forms away from the colonial influence (Byam 230-237). Street theatre in these situations sounds a misnomer since the cultural space of the pre-colonial African societies was never other than open spaces. Ngugi wa Thiong'o has this to say about the pre-colonial Kenyan drama:

> ...it was part and parcel of the rhythm of daily and seasonal life of the community. It was an activity among other activities, often drawing its energy from those other activities. It was also entertainment in the sense of involved enjoyment; it was moral instruction; and it was also a strict matter of life and death and communal survival. This drama was not performed in special buildings set aside for the purpose. It could take place anywhere – wherever there was an 'empty space', to borrow the phrase from Peter Brook. 'The empty space', among the people, was part of that tradition (239).

The dramatic styles introduced by the European colonial and missionary agencies had shown at the best a condescending view towards the African traditional cultural forms and at the worst a downright derision. Ngugi wa Thiang'o even mentions banning of certain ceremonies by the colonial government (Ibid. 239). For reclaiming their national self-respect and for communication with the indigenous communities on a democratic rather than hierarchical plane, it was necessary to revive the ancient rituals, albeit inevitably transforming the pre-colonial content.

The anti-apartheid street theatre in South Africa is still waiting to be documented, according to Jan Cohen-Cruz (282-287). The undocumented street theatre during this apartheid phase mostly took the form of performances at the funerals of the apartheid activists. Such participation being illegal during the white rule explains why they remained undocumented. In the black South African playwright Zakes Mda's observation, the initial phase of theatre against apartheid was of protest,

when the indoor performance attempted to appeal to the conscience of the whites against apartheid; it was a complaint, a supplication (Qtd. in Cohen-Cruz 285). Mda classified the famous South African playwright Athol Fugard in this category. The second phase, which is yet to be documented, is that of 'resistance'. This 'theatre of resistance' was alternatively referred as the 'theatre of extremity' in white anti-apartheid novelist Andre Brink's terms. This kind of black street theatre was

> ...often performed on a fly-by-night basis, hugely inventive in its means and mobile in its movements, could literally flit from one venue to another, unlettered by formal constraints of stage and lighting and auditorium. [...] Wherever an empty space could be found or improvised a play could be performed; by word of mouth an audience could assemble, within minutes, from shacks and shanties and bushes and hideouts; and at the first intimation of approaching police everybody, audience and actors, could disperse just as quickly. Even so, inevitably, people were often arrested, detained, beaten up and harassed. But far from discouraging them, most of them were inspired by such persecution to feats of ever more daring proportion.
>
> Very little record of this 'theatre of extremity' has survived, as both actors and audience would erase all evidence about the event as soon as it was over; texts were almost never committed to paper: for its efficacy this theatre relied exclusively on the immediacy and urgency of the context (Brink qtd. in Cohen-Cruz 286).

South African street theatre is yet another powerful instance of how this genre has been a handy weapon of activist-artistes against oppressive regimes.

Great Britain

Another street theatre group that continues to work now in England, Welfare State International's roots in the anti-Vietnam War protests in 1968 provide its ideological base for its anti-war propaganda through street theatre. Kershaw documents its experiments with the community at Barrow on changing the community's perception towards nuclear armament which had been determined by the residents' dependence for livelihood on the only company in the borough that builds nuclear submarines (Kershaw 208).

Street theatre, whatever shape and form it might take – it is indeed difficult to pin down a set of formal features that fit all practices of street theatre practised all over the world – appears to be related to ancient rituals that are either serious in their intent and performance (such as those performed on the occasion of a communal tragedy) or a communal celebration which is a carnival. But there may not be two opinions about whether street theatre emerges only for social change. It always did. For instance, the Reclaim the Streets (RTS) movement that began in England in the 1990s continues to be extremely popular for its apparently spontaneous ability to put up a spectacle on a busy street of London by cordoning the area and celebrating with song, dance, theatre, jugglery, and whatever form the crowd chose to express their joy and abandon, only the stuck up placards and large

banners – such as ‘RECLAIM THE STREETS – FREE THE CITY/KILL THE CAR’ – expressing their disenchantment with the establishment, their solidarity with the exploited, their resentment and hatred for environmentally hazardous developmental plans of the government and the greed of capitalist system (Jordan 347-357). As the website of Reclaim the Streets proclaims:

> With a metal river on one side and endless windows of consumerism on the other, the street’s true purpose, social interaction, becomes an uneconomic diversion. In its place the corporate-controlled one-way media of newspapers, radio and television become ‘the community’. Their interpretation, our reality. In this sense the streets are the alternative and subversive form of the mass media. Where authentic communication, immediate and reciprocal takes place (Qtd. in Duncombe 348).

The street parties have been so successfully organised precisely because they were not organised. Unlike official celebrations they are never orderly and they were never meant to be. Resistance is not articulated as resistance but as celebration of breaking the law. One expresses dissent by living one’s utopian dream. It is this experiential form of protest which gave the street parties of the RTS their strength in subversion. The movement is fully conscious of the fact that the powers that be are conscious that “[t]o allow people to assemble in the streets is always to flirt with the possibility of improvisation – that the unexpected might happen (Schechner 197).

Covent Garden Community Theatre was formed in mid-1970s as an organised protest against the commercial redevelopment of Covent Garden area in London, and used Street Theatre successfully. Later the group went on to represent less localised issues like capitalism, effect of communication technologies, working of the Parliament etc. They used music, puppetry and magic, coated with fine humour to drive home their point effectively. Covent Garden Community Theatre was as much careful about their facts and figures that went into their content as about the sensibilities of their audience, and accordingly 'named their issue' so as not to estrange their target audience. Their regular venues were pubs, community centres, streets, tents and fields (Mason 68-69).

The period of 1960s is seen as a watershed in the history of theatre in England in particular and Europe in general. Theatre was no longer seen as an elite activity confined to the 'refined' sensibilities of the aristocracy or the educated middle class, but as owing its responsibility towards the concerns of the working class and treating the working class as its primary audience. Theatre became not only overtly political but also, reflecting its ideology, changed its venue. In the hands of groups like CAST, the Brighton Combination and North West Spanner:

> The new theatres would give rise to new structures of performance, and generate new audiences for theatre, creating, in opposition to the dominant formations, alternative circuits which embraced arts labs and community halls, working men's clubs and trade union meetings. Theatre would invade public spaces, redefining the streets as sites for Marxist agitation and Carnivalesque celebration. Gender, race and sexuality were the faultlines around which radical politics would be redrawn, and the history of the

> period is in part the history of their eruption into political and cultural space (McDonnel).

North America

Bread and Puppet Theatre was born in the USA in 1968 as part of the anti-Vietnam War student protests, and continues to renew itself to be relevant to contemporary issues to this day. The contribution of Bread and Puppet Theatre to street theatre was its parades with intricately designed rallies of puppets and artists on stilts. Unlike the stationary form of street theatre performed in one corner of a street or in a circle, Bread and Puppet Theatre's typical street performance included covering the length of a street or several streets with its parades. Bread and Puppet Theatre was committed to appropriating streets from their merely utilitarian or commercial use. According to John Bell, who documented Bread and Puppet Theatre for twenty years:

> Street theatre involved an appropriation of everyday public space for performance. The interruption of normal life crated by a stationary street show or a moving parade is an obvious (and usually welcome) 'misuse' of the street's public space. But street performance is in fact a perfectly appropriate use of the thoroughfare, because of the formal attention it pays to the public nature of the street: its celebration of the street and, inevitably, those who happen to be walking on it (Bell 278).

Using the street, created by the state for its citizens for a certain purpose, for street performance, is itself a defying act, a celebration of dissent and an invitation into the spirit of 'carnival'. Thus through its parades, Bread and Puppet Theatre was able to use the streets for its protest theatricals much more radically than other groups. The founder of the Bread and Puppet Theatre, Peter Schumann, added to street theatre the aspect of the 'parade' as

> ...the most obvious antidote to the supposed vice of political theatre: its tendency to 'preach to the converted.' ....But even if an audience is not swayed by the intensity of dramatic visualization inherent in puppet theatre, the street parade represents a radical use of live public space in an age when ideology and politics saturate the mass mediated forms of television, radio and film, and when public space itself is threatened by increasing privatization in such places as the shopping mall. In this sense, even if a political street parade is seen only by those who have come to see it, or does *not* persuade accidental audiences..., it does assert a dissenting or critical voice; it bears witness (Bell 279).

The political street theatre of The Living Theatre is well known to the world since it was founded by Julian Beck and Judith Malin in 1947 in New York. For the Living Theatre, the goal of street theatre "is to diminish the difference between public and private utterance" (Malina qtd. in Rosenthal 152).

For the Living Theatre:

> The aesthetic of street theatre is based on trying to understand the language of the people on that street. We need to create plays that can speak on many levels to many people.... But what happens or may happen afterwards is much more important than what can be developed in that moment on that street.... Then [the spectators] go home and they talk to other people. Our hope is that this leads to further dialogue. And that is why we stand in the middle of the street – to initiate, to provoke that dialogue" (Ibid. 151-152).

One of the street plays the Living Theatre put up in Pittburgh was *The Money Tower*. (Since it reminds one of *Machine,* a street play put up by Jana Natya Manch in New Delhi, and which will be noted for analysis in Chapter III, let us look at this play in more detail.) *The Money Tower* was performed before the gates of big steel mills in Pittsburg during change of shifts. The timing ensured that there was a large crowd to watch. The performers quickly built a forty-foot tower while singing songs and as quickly and dexterously dismantled after the performance. In the words of Reznikov, one of the directors and performers of the Living Theatre:

> In *The Money Tower* each of these audience groups was represented within the play itself. The worker level was a steel mill. The biomechanical representation of proletarian labor we did was based on etudes devised with the help of people who knew steel-making very well. There was a Plexiglas furnace in the middle of the steel-making level. An elevator ran up the tower. Part of the workers' job was to pull the elevator up and

> down. The elevator brought raw materials out of the mines, which was the bottom level, where black people and the poor people of the Third World were trapped in a place where they couldn't stand up (Qtd. in Rosenthal 156).

The symbolism was simple enough to be understood by the worker in the audience. The raw material coming from the bottom, that is, from the poor people and the Third World, is transformed into money at the top, where too few people are located. The raw material goes through several modifications by the people at different levels of the tower – the steel workers, the packaging middle class, the protecting military class – before it reaches the top few in the form of money. The burden of the entire tower is on the people at the bottom most layer. The principle of capitalist and imperialist exploitation of the poor and the Third World is driven home to the audience quickly through an attractive spectacle.

Another well-known and very successful street play of Living Theatre was *Waste*, which was performed in the New York City between 1989 and 1991. Other plays of the Living Theatre include *Six Public Acts, The Legacy of Cain* series, *Turing the Earth, Tumult or Clearing the Streets,* and *I and Thou*.

In the words of Julian Beck, one of the founders of the Living Theatre, their mission is:

> To call into question
> who we are to each other in the social environment of the theater,

to undo the knots

that lead to misery,

to spread ourselves

across the public's table

like platters at a banquet,

to set ourselves in motion

like a vortex that pulls the

spectator into action,

to fire the body's secret engines,

to pass through the prism

and come out a rainbow,

to insist that what happens in the jails matters,

to cry "Not in my name!"

at the hour of execution,

to move from the theater to the street and from the street to the

theater.

This is what The Living Theatre does today.

It is what it has always done

(http://www.livingtheatre.org/about/ourmission).

It may not be an exaggeration to say that except for the opposition to capital punishment (“to insist that what happens in the jails matters, to cry "Not in my name!” at the hour of execution,”), which continues to be one of the specific concerns of the Living Theatre, the rest of this mission statement can pass off as the manifesto of ‘street theatre’ anywhere in the world. Though the Living

Theatre has been on stage and in the streets throughout its long and tumultuous history, its abiding concern has been to break the 'fourth wall' between the performers and the audience.

Abbie Hoffman's Yippie Movement in late 1960s attacked the complacency of the US establishment in their self-designated role of the Big Brother of the world. An anarchic anti-establishmentarian, Hoffman created theatrics such as throwing real and fake dollar bills from New York Stock Exchange provoking people on the ground to scramble for the bills, to expose the NYSE's encouragement of people's greed for money. His own talk shows and mock press meets highlighted how the so-called free press in the US was actually selective in its reporting and highly manipulative of truth. He was the *enfant terrible* of the media, disrupting and embarrassing his hosts to drive home his hatred for the way media puts up the show of transparency and political correctness (Hoffman 190-195).

Street theatre groups are more and more immediate issue-specific and increasingly distance themselves from the idea of a future revolution. A famous example is ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), which has grown leaps and bounds since its inception in 1987. With a focus on justice for AIDS victims and sexual discrimination, the group has been innovatively practicing street theatre mostly protesting the state's indifference to responsible legislation with regard to pharmaceutical policy, gay and lesbian rights, and against public and corporate discrimination towards AIDS victims (Alisa Solomon 42-51). Initially the conventional theatre in the US took up this issue actively. But when street performance was able to make much better impact, conventional theatre gradually

moved away from AIDS related themes. The success of the street theatre vis a vis the issue of AIDS is in its capacity to draw real AIDS victims and non-professional actors with concern for AIDS victims into its fold and giving vent to real rage and grief through street performances. This is yet another instance of street theatre rising out of the intended spectators' community, by them, for them, and also of erasing the conventional line between performer and role. As Solomon remarks, "Good political protest has always been consciously theatrical"(44) ACT UP has brought back the 1960s to the streets of the US with lawyers, stockbrokers, teachers, artists, advertisers, publishers, writers and doctors getting roped into this powerful protest theatre, because of its well choreographed and nonviolent ways of demonstrating civil disobedience. Through outrageous claiming of the streets, disrupting traffic, sometimes getting carried away by unintentional vandalism and courting massive arrests, the organisation deliberately and cunningly designed its activities to get its message capture the attention of, and thus frequent appearance on, popular media channels. For ACT UP, the governments have already been resorting to dramaturgy in order to deceive its people, so it is appropriate that they are paid back in the same coin.

The Church Ladies for Choice, as an active pro-choice (in favour of the mother's right for deciding about abortion) group, led successful street campaigns in New York in 1993, in reaction against the anti-abortionists. They could successfully counter the conservative interpretation of the Church teachings without defying religion altogether. Their theatricals predominantly included songs with comic overtones to counter and reduce the impact of the grim, melodramatic demonstrations of the antis (Cohen-Cruz 90-99).

Street theatre is catching up as a novelty entertainment in cities in especially many developed countries. In Canada, for instance, the Annual Outdoor Buskers' Festival in cities like Edmonton, Ottawa and Halifax has now become a tradition and other cities are fast catching up. "More communities are discovering that adding their name to the buskers' summer circuit is an exciting way to promote their municipalities without the burden of providing performance fees, complicated organization or venue rentals. Simply choose a weekend, close off a city street and let the performers, well, sing for their supper" (Telenko). Though the genre is well-respected, the buskers' street theatre, the purpose of which is solely entertainment, cannot be classified with the other instances in this discussion which belong to the larger rubric of political theatre. However, the busker's perception of the street as venue for their theatricals is reflected in the comment below by Dean Barehaum (a.k.a. Dr. D) of Calgary's Green Fools, a renowned busker group:

> With indoor theatre you've always got a captive audience, for one,... [a]nd you have the ability to play with lights and sound. Whereas the street is so much about environment and your relationship with the audience. Anything can happen in a street show. Any rigid structure to a show has to be flexible. A dog, a screaming child, can be dealt with in a certain way. You definitely have to have improv skills, and you have to be spontaneous (Qtd. in Telenko).

Asia

Street theatre has been used effectively employing powerful images and characters from folklore with modern content to drive home a current concern. Especially in circumstances where a community is physically displaced and culturally alienated, any attempt to communicate with the community would do well to connect with its folklore that dominates its worldview. In a refugee camp of the Hmong community, who had been displaced from their traditional habitat in small mountain top villages in northern Laos and put in a refugee camp in Thailand, it was Hmong folklore which came handy to raise the awareness of the community about its upkeep of health and hygiene in the different environs of the camp (Conquergood 220-229). It was not the typical political theatre aimed at protesting against the powerful, which is the hallmark of street theatre. Nevertheless the street theatre that adopted the Hmong folklore served to 'empower' the community by valorising their heritage and world view allowing them to look at their own conditions critically instead of positing an alternative cultural form alien to their worldview and prone to an instinctive resistance.

Street theatre in history has always been linked to political opposition to the establishment. Its revival and continued practice signify the presence of deep rooted dissent in the society. While plays on the stage have dealt with 'timeless' topics with no particular sense of urgency for inciting real life action, it is only when one cannot afford to wait for things to change does one resort desperately to street theatre. For, one does not wait for the audience to turn up in street theatre, rather it is street theatre which rushes in a hurry, as it were, to take the message to wherever its audience are. Philippines is a fine example. In the struggle for

national democracy from 1970s to 1990s, the form of street theatre was revived in Philippines. Taking inspiration from Brecht, the cultural revolution of China, Boal and the community based African theatre, the political activists of Philippines created theatrical forms of protest and took to the streets. In their attempt they followed the traditional Filipino theatre's religious motifs of journey (quest for freedom), struggle, death and resurrection. The typical structure of a Philippine political street play (in fact, street play itself was political in Philippines) in the late 1970s was, in the tradition of the Philippine epic, like this:

> ...exposition on the conditions of the main characters, usually workers or peasants; the 'journey' they embark on in Philippine society; the heightening of difficulties and oppression; a 'death' in the form of a seeming defeat in the struggle; and then, gathering strength from each other, 'resurrection' as they unite to face the enemy (Barrios 256).

Boal's image theatre was also creatively used on the streets for actively involving audience in the resolution of a problem – such as boycott of elections in 1984 – being discussed through a tableau. Some of the theatre groups that used street theatre effectively for political propaganda include *Panday Sining* (Moulders of Art), UP Repertory Company, the Mindanao Council for People's Culture, and *Bulawan*.

Yet again proving how the genre of street theatre seems to have a universal connection with political resistance, the street theatre or Parallel Theatre Movement started in Pakistan during the Martial Law regime of General Zia-ul-

Haque from 1979 to 1989. Street and stage theatre groups such as Ajoka and Lok Rehas in Lahore, Sanjh in Pindi, Saraike Lok Tamasha in Multan, Tehrik-i-Niswan, Dastak, Sevak, and Baang in Karachi proliferated. These groups braved the repressive regime and gave voice to the concerns of women and other marginalised groups in Pakistan. This period also saw a strong Movement for Restoration of Democracy and formation of Women's Action Forum in Pakistan. Street theatre reflected these democratic aspirations of Pakistani people (Afzal-Khan 42).

Ajoka which was formed in 1983 gave street theatrical representation to women's concerns. The founder of Ajoka, Madeeha Gauhar, drew inspiration from Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal. Ajoka also introduced the Indian street theatre exponent Badal Sircar to Pakistan. In their preface to the Urdu translation of Sircar's *Juloos*, Nadeem and Gauhar say:

> Commercial theatre in Pakistan today [including stage and TV productions], has become degraded and meaningless. We, the Ajoka Theatre Workshop, wish to challenge conventional theatrical forms and their pietistic content through the production of socially meaningful theatre. We propose doing drama in which the distance between spectators and actors can be eliminated (Nadeem and Gauhar qtd. in Afzal-Khan 44).

In Bangladesh, community based street theatre is taking strong roots. Though not in an anti-establishment militant form, the street theatre developed by the cultural workers of Loke Nattya O Sanskritik Unnayan Kendro (LOSAUK), a peoples' organization for socio-cultural development, started in 1987 in Khulna, a port city

in the southwest of Bangladesh, use indigenous Bengali art forms such as *jatra* and *khaner gan* "to raise social awareness and advocate change" (Ahsan 50).

Looking at the students' protest in 1989 at Tiananmen Square in Beijing as street theatre from Bakhtin's concept of 'carnivalesque', Schechner describes how the aspirations of people reach a crescendo of libertarian excesses in a carnivalesque spectacle, before its debacle flows into history, albeit bring about reforms in status quo if not revolution (Schechner 196-207 in Cohen-Cruz). That the students' street theatre at Tiananmen Square had its origin in the theatre contingents in 1930s and 1940s travelling with the Red Army in the years leading to the Chinese revolution may not be an excessive stretch of imagination (see Edgar Snow's *Red Theatre*).

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As we have seen in the survey above, street theatre has been used and is being used actively both in developed and developing countries. Apart from its continued use as a dramatic form solely for entertainment, its primary purpose has been social change, if not revolution. Its concerns range from the radically militant political propaganda against an established social order to reformatory awareness building often with active support from the state.

We conclude this chapter with a look at one of the most recent applications of street theatre in the US by a group called Whistleblowers Theatre in the case of Chelsea Manning, a US Private who participated in the war on Iraq and was convicted for leaking state secrets. Whistleblowers Theater is dedicated to using "our art to support revolutionary progress for our society" (http://bradass87.wordpress.com/about/).

Bradley Edward Manning (Chelsea Manning) is a US Army soldier sentenced for 35 years in July 2013 on charges of espionage. He had leaked to public the largest ever set of classified documents, which for him exposed the deceit of the US diplomatic policy. Among other things, the documents contained sensitive material on US airstrikes on Iraq in 2007 and on Afghanistan in 2009. Much of the material was published by WikiLeaks or its media partners between April and November 2010 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chelsea_Manning). Edward Snowden formerly with the CIA and now on the run for similarly leaking classified documents of the US government admitted that Manning was his inspiration.

The short street play (provided in the Appendix I), performed several times in the US since Manning's conviction by the Whistleblowers Theater, shows the individual who is caught in a moral dilemma between loyalty and patriotism to one's country and a revulsion towards the criminal operations of one's government against weaker countries and their civil societies. This dilemma is personified by Manning, whose suffering at the hands of his own government evokes memories of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and the street play itself may be compared to the medieval pageants of the Crucifixion.

In a society such as that of the US that boasts of more freedom than in most countries, it is a courageous act to expose its hypocrisy to the world at the cost of persecution in one's own society. It is an act of ethical liberation of the entire society, albeit performed by a single individual. When this heroic deed is

performed through an artistic form such as street theatre, the intention of such an effort is truly to erase the boundaries between art and life, and between the spectator and the actor, who participate in the enactment of protest in their roles as citizens.

That such an enactment is warranted in today's technologically advanced world appears an irony of sorts, but perfectly in order, considering the reality of big capital in the media and its nexus with the state. If art defamiliarizes reality for us and facilitates a fresh insight into our everyday living, this is what individuals like Manning upheld by this short piece of street theatre do to us. In Manning's words from the play, "We're human… and we're killing ourselves… and no one seems to see that… and it bothers me. Apathy. Apathy is far worse than the active participation."

The brief survey of street theatre in the international scenario in this chapter tries to show this genre has been in the mission of correcting this apathy.

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Chapter Three

‘The Right to Perform’

Modern street theatre in India developed in different streams each characterised by its commitment or sympathy towards or the lack of it to a specific political ideology, predominantly of the various hues of Left – undoubtedly due to its initial active use, in its agitation-propaganda form by the various regional units of Indian People's Theatre Association. Though, in the ultimate analysis, not all practitioners of street theatre adhered to any specific political ideology, it is significant that it has come to be associated unequivocally with direct attempts at social change. This is undoubtedly the common characteristic of street theatre practice in India, as it is diachronically and synchronically the case in the other parts of the world (see the previous chapter). It was never used merely for entertainment in the different forms of comedy (though humour is almost an integral part of most street plays) or to indulge in cynical reproach or resentment against the system or middle class domestic foibles, as is the case with a significant portion of proscenium theatre practice in India.

In almost every discussion of street theatre two issues that prominently emerge are: one, its relationship with proscenium theatre – which inevitably leads into vexed issues of the (active or passive) role of the spectator, the choice of venue, its design (if it is indoors), the themes chosen for the content of the drama, the class

nature of the production etc; second, its relation to the folk forms indigenous to India and a related issue of the origin of street theatre. There are different stances available among the street theatre ideologues in India on these issues. As for the first issue regarding its contradiction with proscenium theatre, since the genre was adopted by IPTA and its regional units for their immediate need to communicate their message clearly to their target population, that is, the lower sections of economic strata in the Indian society, it was not a conscious attempt on their part to shun proscenium theatre. Safdar Hashmi's denial of any opposition between street theatre and proscenium reflects the point of view of IPTA. He refers to the "unfortunate tendency to project street theatre as a rebellion against the proscenium theatre, or as standing in opposition to it....In our view it is absurd to speak of a contradiction between proscenium and street theatres" (2008, pp.14-15). For Hashmi, both forms of theatre should belong to the people (in the Marxist sense of the term). In fact, IPTA used proscenium theatre uninhibitedly through its most active phase alongside street theatre and other folk forms. On the same side of the political spectrum, there is also this view that the proscenium stage has connections with the growth of capitalism in India. The Marathi commercial dramatic companies introduced it to facilitate ticketing (Deshpande, Sudhanva 2009, p. 24). This, of course, does not mean that it will be untouchable to the Left because of its origins. Badal Sircar, on the other hand, has in his career gradually switched over from proscenium to open spaces associating the former with alienating the spectator, an uncritical acceptance of the Western theatrical tradition. (We shall look at his perspective in more detail in the course of this chapter.) The fact of the matter, however, is that proscenium itself in India has not remained static (if we define proscenium as indoor theatre in opposition to an

outdoor production). There have been experiments galore on the way space is designed for performance and spectatorship for influencing the quality of audience reception and participation in performance.

On the second issue, which is about the relationship of folk forms with street theatre, there have been strong views about the use of folk forms in the modern context and in the context of street theatre practice. As Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker opines, “The political conception of folk theatre as a people’s theatre evokes in part the European Enlightenment definition of “folk” as “the people.” But in India it also points to the popular appeal of village forms, their potential for subversive social meaning, and their connection with various forms of populist street theatre. The folk repertoire thus appears as a historical legacy as well as a powerful resource in the present” (312). But both Hashmi and Badal Sircar are extremely wary of the folk forms. With traditional and folk forms, the problem for Hashmi is that “if you work with the traditional form, along comes the traditional content with its superstition, backwardness, obscurantism, and its promotion of feudal structures” (Qtd. in van Ervin 1989, p.33). But Hashmi does not reject the traditional forms outright. “He and his colleagues consider them very rich and potentially very useful for their own kind of theatre, but they want to be careful not to vulgarize and thereby exploit them” (Ibid. 34). Badal Sircar wanted to achieve a synthesis of the best of the city theatre and the folk form, disillusioned by the limitations of both. In the case of folk forms, he found that in them the “themes remain mostly stagnant and sterile, unconnected with [the people’s] own problems of emancipation...” (2-3).

As for the origins of street theatre, though there have been two major arguments apparently contradicting each other, both seem to be valid and to complement each other in the broader context of Indian street theatre. While some found the roots of street theatre in traditional art forms such as *Veedhi Bhagavatam*, *Tamasha*, and *Jathra* (see Chapter I for a detailed discussion), the others found it a direct and desirable import from the progressive and revolutionary practices of the erstwhile USSR and Europe. Hashmi categorically states: "Street theatre as it is known today can trace its direct lineage no further than the years immediately after the Russian Revolution of 1917" (1989, p.10). In line with Hashmi's argument, Sadanand Menon speaks of "the 'radicalization' of theatre practice in the wake of re-vitalization by the Communist movement in the mid-twentieth century, which led to a free integration of various regional and local forms with urban stage conventions, concluding a few years later in the idea of the 'Theatre of Roots'...the imposition of a national Emergency in 1975, which gave fillip to the emergence and consolidation of a contemporary, activist genre of 'street theatre' in the country" (83).

The necessarily sweeping and selective survey of street theatre practices in India, in the following pages of this chapter, demonstrates the issues flagged off above in practice with the diversity of response characteristic of India. For instance, all the street theatre practitioners described here acknowledge their adoption of traditional forms of their respective regions. IPTA's regional units experimented with traditional art forms with perhaps no self-consciousness, inhibitions and wariness observable in the later practitioners like Hashmi. As Malini Bhattacharya notes: "Many erstwhile IPTA activists, when asked today about the formal

experimentations undertaken in the ‘40s, express surprise or even a slight degree of irritation. They point out that they were not interested in experiments but in communicating a message and for this they were willing to take the help of whatever forms were available” (173).

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Indian People’s Theatre Association

Street theatre of the Left in India inherited the political theatre traditions of post-revolution USSR and the German experiments of Erwin Piscator and Brecht – in re-appropriating the people’s ancient art forms for their own service, in displacing the bourgeois concepts of aesthetics and art, and in playing a critical role in society (Deshpande, Sudhanva 1997, p. 6). It is out of this inspiration that Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) was formed in 1943 from the Fourth All India Conference of Progressive Writers’ Association on 25 May (Bhattacharya 179).

Though IPTA brought into existence several cultural squads across India and is primarily responsible for the proliferation of modern street play, the earliest account of its first production dates as late as 1951, when a street play *Chargesheet* was performed in West Bengal, by the first theatre squad of IPTA formed under the leadership of Panu Pal, to propagate the demand for the release of illegally detained Communist leaders. Panu Pal’s first street play *Vote-er Bhet* was performed in several election rallies before the 1952 General Elections. The

cast included, among others, Utpal Dutt and Ritwik Ghatak, who later contributed much to theatre as well as the celluloid (Biswas and Banerjee 34).

IPTA had an active presence in all the Communist movements of the 1940s. According to a report from *People's War*, "The 1942 All India Kisan Sabha conference at Bihta in Bihar had not been without songs. But the two subsequent ones held in 1944 and 1945 respectively at Bezwada in Andhra and Netrakona in Bengal, like the Bengal provincial conferences at Domar, Phulbari or Hatgobindapur, showed more organised cultural activity....The cultural programme at Bezwada was said to be the 'most popular feature of the session' (Qtd. in Bhattacharya 170) Bhattacharya further reports: "At Bezwada, squads from different provinces sang patriotic songs. Among the provincial troupes specially mentioned in the report were those from Andhra and Bengal. The strength of Andhra's repertoire lay in its adaptation of folk forms. There was a Burrakatha on the plight of the agricultural labourer, a *Kolattam* (stick-dance) on the red army, and a street play (*Veedhi Bhagavatam*) on Hitler's downfall. In the farcical feature, Hitler strutted the stage with his entourage of yes-men, two rich peasants who kept on repeating his words, and Mussolini and Tojo appeared weeping on Hitler's shoulder" (Ibid. 170).

Though the Communist Party enjoyed popular support in certain areas of nationalist struggles during 1942-46, it was not able to bring about unification of these widely scattered struggles across the country. After the Independence, the 'enemy' has changed for it from the imperialist coloniser to the nationalist bourgeois, the latter bent upon crushing the popular struggles. (Telangana Armed

Peasant Struggle, which will be dealt with in detail in Chapter IV, is a significant example.) “At least from early 1948, official and unofficial attacks were also concentrated against IPTA programmes and activists” (Ibid. 173).

About the origins of the modern form of street theatre in India, Sudhanva Deshpande has this to say:

> Street theatre as we know it today was (re)born in 1978 and this time the pioneers were Jana Natya Manch in north India and Samudaya in south India. Through the 1950s, 60s and up to the mid-70s, barring Utpal Dutt’s occasional forays on to the street, there is virtually no evidence of street theatre being done in India (1997, p.7).

The gap is explained by the fact that a politically committed genre like street theatre flourishes during times of repression. (That it was used for other purposes is a later phenomenon.) Thus it needed a political upheaval of the magnitude of the Emergency for its revival. Another reason might be that the experimentation with political theatre attempted in the conventional Indian theatre in the 1960s and 1970s – Badal Sircar, Dharamvir Bharati, Girish Karnad, G.P. Deshpande brought political issues on to the mainstream stage – might have led to the resurgence of street theatre, just as the experimentation in the West – mentioned in the previous chapter – by pioneers such as Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Copeau, Grotowski, Barba, Craig, Piscator, and Brecht influenced the street theatre of the West.

Jana Natya Manch

Jana Natya Manch (Janam) was born out of IPTA. Though Janam adopted street theatre in a full-fledged manner in 1978, young members of IPTA, of whom Safdar Hashmi was one, had made tentative attempts at street play earlier – they once put up a brief play called the *Nixon-Kissinger Dialogue* against Vietnam War in front of the USIS office in Delhi in 1971, and later a street play called *Kursi, Kursi, Kursi* – that satirised the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's refusal to step down in spite of the Allahabad High Court's judgement that disqualified her election. This was just before Indira Gandhi clamped Emergency. All agitational activity of a cultural or a political variety had to fold up during this period.

After the Emergency was lifted and Janam was formed (due to differences with IPTA), street theatre suggested itself by necessity, partly due to lack of funding for Janam for bigger performances. Of course, as Safdar Hashmi himself admits, "An actor committed to people's art and wishing to perform in front of large masses is naturally drawn towards street theatre" (1989, p.4). The first street play that Janam mounted during this period was *Machine* in 1978. *Machine* was prepared at the insistence of a trade union leader who reported to Hashmi about the plight of workers of a company called Herig-India. This play, when it was put up at the factory gates for workers, was an instant success. Again when it was performed at a national level trade union conference, about 1,60,000 people watched it, tape-recorded it. In a month it was being performed in many parts of the country in the local languages. The play used an abstract idea of comparing the system in a factory to a machine and the different functionaries of it to the different parts of

the machine – just like *The Money Tower* put up by the Living Theatre at a Pittsburg factory (see Chapter II). In the same manner as the tower collapses due to the weight of the upper floors occupied by the exploiting class in ascending order, the machine by Janam comes to a grinding halt due to the inequalities existing between the different classes represented by different parts of the machine. [It must be a coincidence that similar ideas struck the two organisations for their similar forms for similar ends! The Living Theatre's play preceded the Janam's at least by four years. However, there is no account of any influence of the Living Theatre on Janam in the scholarship available to this researcher. In fact, Sudhanva Deshpande rather self-consciously denies any influence of Brecht, Piscator, Boal or Badal Sircar – with which at least Hashmi and N.K.Sharma of the team Janam were aware – on Janam production (1997, p.10).]

With all its pleasantly surprising response that *Machine* drew from workers, what *Machine* did for Janam was:

> ...to encapsulate the basic framework of Janam's future work; or, if you will, it indicated the terrain over which Janam's street theatre has traversed to date: in the moment of its birth, street theatre allied itself with the people, the revolutionary classes in particular; it signalled the involvement of its audiences in the creative process itself (remember, the idea for *Machine* came from a trade unionist); it placed poetry in the foreground; it laid stress on theatrical innovation; and it inspired several others to take up street theatre (Ibid. 10).

Eugène van Ervin, a witness to the play, records: “During the performances I witnessed some of the workers in the audiene apparently knew the text so well that they whispered along with the dialog (sic), adding a ritualistic quality to the event” (1989, p. 40). On the crest of this success, Janam prepared seven plays – *Gaon se Shahr Tak* on a landless peasant becoming an industrial worker, *Hatyare* on the communal riots in Aligarh, *DTC ki Dhandhali* on the bus fare hike in Delhi, *Aurat* the most successful play of Janam on the empowerment of women, *Teen Crore* and *Raja ka Baja* on unemployment, and *Aya Chunao*, the first election play of Janam – in the following fourteen months giving 500 shows in all (Deshpande, Sudhanva 1997, p.10). Except one or two, most of them were very successfully received. Speaking about them, Deshpande remarks:

> Each of these seven plays of the first year is distinct in style and, even when not successful, well-crafted: not a moment is wasted, the action is tight, the language has a flow, the dialogues are easy on the tongue (and ear), the humour sharp but never unnecessary, the characters delineated with minimum effort (a turn of phrase here, a piece of costume there), the songs lyrical yet forceful (Ibid. 10).

Shortly after this, Janam produced *Samrath ko Nahin Dosh Gosai* on the price rise. This play used the technique of a street magician and his boy as the main characters. This technique has been very popular ever since and adapted by many street theatre groups for dealing with many issues (Ghosh 2012, pp.52-55).

Janam also updated its perspective from time to time, unusual in street theatre groups. For instance, one of its most successful plays, *Yeh Dil Maange More, Guruji,* was a response to the anti-Muslim riots that shook Gujarat in 2002 and hence was topical in the true street theatre tradition. This play that targeted Bharatiya Janata Party in the wake of the riots, was reviewed again in 2005 by the Janam team to incorporate into it a new understanding about Hindu communalism thus making a general issue of "the long term threat of Hindu fascist organisation to the Indian nation-state" central to the play (Ghosh 2010, p. 77).

It is while performing the play *Halla Bol* that revolved around the issue of the industrial strike in Delhi, on 1 January 1989, Safdar Hashmi was attacked by hooligans belonging to the then ruling party. He succumbed to severe head injuries the next day. Hashmi's martyrdom gave rise to worldwide protests against the threat to people's artistes like Hashmi. Across the country the live and dormant theatre groups rose in solidarity and exploded through street theatre performances in memory of Hashmi. His death, like his life, enlivened people's theatre in the country. Every year on 12 April, that is, Hashmi's birthday, Street Theatre Day is celebrated in India. Janam continues to take forward Hashmi's legacy through its active contribution to people's movements through its carefully crafted and produced street plays.

The Third Theatre

Badal Sircar's name looms large on the horizon of Indian street theatre. 'Street theatre' may not be the term that Badal Sircar would like. But it is difficult to

leave him out from any discussion of street theatre, if we conceptualise ‘street theatre’ primarily and essentially as a theatre that erases the distance between the spectator and the performer.

Badal Sircar’s concept of ‘Third Theatre’ was born out of his understanding of the dichotomy between the theatrical culture in the cities and in the villages of India. In Sircar’s words:

> The city theatre today is not a natural development of the traditional or folk theatre in the urban setting as it should have. Rather, it is a new theatre based on Western theatre... [A]lmost every aspect of Indian city theatre has its roots in Western tradition, whereas the traditional village theatre has retained most of its indigenous characteristics and even thrived, in many cases. Both theatres exist today, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. It would be meaningless to valorize one and condemn the other. What we need to do is to analyse both the theatre forms to find the exact points of strength and weakness and their causes, and that may give us the clue for an attempt to create a Theatre of Synthesis – a Third Theatre (2).

If the first theatre is traditional village theatre (for example in the Bengali folk form of a *Jatra*), the second is the theatre of city, the proscenium theatre, which keeps the audience in dark. According to Sircar, the proscenium (or picture-frame) theatre competes with cinema in producing a realistic illusion. In this it is an extremely poor match taking into account the technology deployable by cinema.

But theatre's strength is that "a live person communicates directly to another live person. This is the principal point that theatre must utilize to the maximum in order to compete with cinema, which cannot use live people for direct communication. Have we done it? Alas, no!" (Ibid. 12). A spectator comes to theatre prepared to work up his/her imagination and does not expect verisimilitude to reality in the setting. But the same spectator is not happy if the cinema does not produce that verisimilitude. This advantage is rejected by the second theatre for a long time (Ibid. 14). The second theatre does not use the personality and the body (including the voice) of the performer and does not provide the right language for powerful theatrical effect. Theatre is inexpensive. But we are "pushing it into the hands of big business, or making it dependent on public or private (sometimes foreign) assistance" (Ibid. 15). In the present proscenium stage, there is a separation of spectators from the performers and of the performers from each other, which the Third Theatre attempted to remove. Similarly the Third Theatre attempted to remove the decadent value system represented in the content of the traditional village theatre.

Though Sircar was not advocating any political ideology, he brought a spirit of movement with his theatre team Satabdi. With him theatre is an honest communication of the performer to the spectator. This integrity that he insisted for in his performers not only required a rigorous process of self-awareness mediated by theatrical exercises and games, but also a deep relationship with the content of the drama being enacted. Recalling his experience of attending the rehearsals of Richard Schechner's The Performance Group, Sircar notices how

> it was a process of confronting, exploring and assimilating the meaning of the whole play through every situation, every line – till the script was no longer something written by a playwright; rather, it became a play *felt* and *made* by the performers themselves (Ibid. 29).

In his early experiments he used an auditorium that he hired, named it *Anganmancha* and modified it so as to bring spectators closer to the performers – in fact removing mutually exclusive places for the two groups – to practise Third Theatre. He successfully produced plays like *Sagina Mahato, Ballavpurer Rupkatha, Sesh Nei, Evam Indrajit, Spartacus, Abu Hossain, Bhoma, Prastab, Tringsha Shatabdi, and Michhil* in the Third Theatre technique. *Michhil* that poignantly highlights the city folk's apathy to individual suffering was translated and performed in many Indian languages as street theatre.

By way of presenting Badal Sircar from a different perspective, let me quote an opinion from the 'official left'. While acknowledging the contribution of Badal Sircar by way of enriching the understanding of even many theatre groups of the Left in the formal aspects of performing in open spaces, Sudhanva Deshpande of Jana Natya Manch recalls the uneasy relationship that existed between the Third Theatre and the Left, which he attributes to Sircar's worldview:

> ...a certain kind of political ambivalence is inscribed into his plays and his dramaturgy itself. Badal Sircar's theatre tends to elevate the natural cynicism of the middle classes into a political philosophy, preventing it from becoming a truly people's theatre – 'people' in the Marxist sense of

> the term. I am not accusing Badal Sircar of political dishonesty. On the contrary: I realize that his theatre is scrupulously honest to the middle-class view of life, including, at times, to the middle-class aversion to politics (1997, p.14).

Shayoni Mitra on the other hand feels that "[i]t is hard to judge the impact of Sircar's socialist politics. It is true however that he has been reaching audiences larger than any conventional theatre does simply by moving outside of the conventional proscenium stage and performing for free. His has been a sustained effort to make his plays and the surrounding debate accessible to all viewers and has empowered them to participate in local political discourse" (71).

This example of an opinion is shown here to highlight the fact that the term 'street theatre' has come to receive a deeply entrenched connotation of a genre of the political Left. This is one reason why perhaps Sircar did not use the term street theatre for his kind of theatre, though his technique could have easily broadened and enriched the scope of the rubric 'street theatre' in India had his politics been different.

West Bengal

Utpal Dutt, who was a member of IPTA for a brief time, is credited with performing street theatre fairly consistently, though the dramaturgy that he used in his street plays might not have been very different from the stage plays (Deshpande, Sudhanva, 1997, p. 7). Utpal Dutt is also credited with rejuvenating

the traditional art form *jatra* for political propaganda, which he did extensively during elections, though he was also very successful on the celluloid (Banerji 227). West Bengal was witness to a vibrant street theatre practice in the 1960s and 1970s. Many groups and individuals, apart from IPTA, took initiative to create street plays with strong political messages. The Naxalbari movement in 1967 created yet another divide in the Communist Party, this time a bloody one. Though the Communist Party in the opposition was a dynamic subverting force critiquing the establishment, when it came to power in West Bengal the cultural forms were co-opted for the propaganda of the government rather than for the people's cause. It is a historical irony that the same party that brought street theatre into vogue, inspired by the Bolshevik cultural squads of the post-Soviet revolution, became the cause of its decline. Samik Bandhyopadhay has this to say about the unfortunate transformation in the integrity of both politics and the art that went with it:

> The Communist Party was reshaping itself to play a more liberal, sanitized parliamentary game, and the cultural compulsions of the 40s were no longer there. The style of the political address soon changed – the more formal, individualistic, factual, superficial manner of Jyoti Basu! More than ideology or the larger historical-cultural appeal of the earlier leaders, it was now a more bureaucratic, strategic playing for immediate reaction – and votes. Street theatre, too, underwent a transformation, with its scope/appeal limited to immediate issues. The first products of the new street theatre were geared to a particular strike or a particular by-election – and would be followed by a whole tradition of election plays, which in the

> 80s would come to exploit the ‘star’ presences of actors and actresses, for whom performing in one of these election plays would be tantamount to taking a position in support of the political forces in power, seeking a return to power and assured of it anyway – and more often than not expecting benefits/returns for their involvement/commitment! (26)

Debunking consciously the myth that street theatre has to necessarily sacrifice aesthetics, ‘Jana Sanskriti Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed’ in rural West Bengal nurtures aesthetically appealing and socially relevant street theatre among the landless workers and small peasants. Drawing techniques and ideological inspiration directly and expressly from Augusto Boal, Jana Sanskriti uses Forum Theatre technique to address the issues related to social inequalities, critiquing the class perspective of the ruling Communist Party in the State. (“Jana Sanskriti Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed, based in West Bengal, is probably the largest and longest lasting Forum Theatre operation in the world. It was considered by Augusto Boal to be the chief exponent of his methodology outside of its native Brazil”, claims the website of Jana Sanskriti – www.janasanskriti.org).

Founded in 1985 by Sanjoy Ganguly, who is its director, Jana Sanskriti’s membership, barring a few urban, middle-class members, mostly consists of agricultural and wage labourers belong to low- to middle-caste families, with men and women being in equal numbers. The major tasks of these members involve collective preparation of scripts for their theatre, enacting those scripts and when they are not doing theatre getting down to challenge and change the existing

oppressive power relations in their lives. The theatre teams, trained by Jana Sanskriti, work in the villages of southern districts of West Bengal and other parts of India. The typical process of their work includes both working with the theatre and working on the real issues in the places that they work. Describing Jana Sanskriti's comprehensive work distributed between these two practices of performances and field work, Dia Mohan observes:

> The first practice involves rehearsals, theatre workshops, enactment of plays, engagement in Forum Theatre, and organizing cultural festivals. The second involved the process of calling meetings, discussion and debate groups, brainstorming sessions, "ideological training," all of which was aimed at maintaining a semblance of cohesion, coherence, and continuity over seasons and across theatre teams situated in disparate village communities in rural Bengal. Through these two practices, over time the theatre teams come to constitute nodes of cultural and political activism and representation in villages. They engage in bargaining with the *panchayat* for the right to cultural spaces, fighting dowry and domestic violence, mobilizing people to participate in cultural activities, demanding the right to work in the villages rather than being dependent on migration for work, and mobilizing anti-liquor agitations (4).

Using Boalian techniques of Image Theatre and Forum Theatre, "the stories that Jana Sanskriti's plays tell across the rural landscape of Bengal are stories drawn from the lives of landless labourers, of wives in patriarchal homes and

communities, those marginalized from history, victims of *panchayat* corruption, party political violence, and victims of capitalist development" (Ibid. 5).

Samudaya, Karnataka

A pioneer in street theatre, Samudaya was formed in Bangalore in 1975 in response to the Emergency. It rapidly became a street theatre movement with additional units in other parts of Karnataka such as Shimoga, Dharwar, Udipi, Mangalore, Mysore and Raichur. In its first production, *Hutava Badidare,* Samudaya took a historical play infusing it with a radical interpretation. This was followed by *Paata Ondu, Paata Yeradu* and two Brecht plays, *Mother* and *Galileo*. These were however proscenium plays directed by the renowned director Prasanna. Another great theatre personality B.V. Karanth provided music for *Hutava Badidare*.

The first street theatre production of Samudaya was *Belchi* based on the burning of Dalit labourers in Bihar in 1977. This has been one of Samudaya's most popular street plays. Much like Janam in Delhi, Samudaya brought out eight street plays within almost a year of its first production. Following *Belchi* Samudaya produced: *May Day* (on workers' unity), *Struggle* (on a strike in a Bangalore factory), *Chasnala* (on the tragic death of mining workers in Dhanbad), *Pathre Sangappa* (on the murder of a Dalit bonded labourer by his master), *Belavaduru* (on superstitions), *Bharata Darshana* (on police killings in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh), and *Jeethadahatti Ranga* (on bonded labour). The performance of

Pathre Sangappa was able to influence the reduction of Congress vote share in Chickmagalur by-election in 1977 (Scrampickal 116).

Initially Samudaya team was trained by Badal Sircar and his Satabdi team, who conducted two-week workshop for them. This accounts for the influence of Badal Sircar's Third Theatre on Samudaya (Deshpande, Sudhanva 1997, p. 14). In what they call *jatha*s that they conduct periodically, Samudaya teams travel across Karnataka performing street plays in every nook and corner of the State. As for the purpose of such jathas, Rathi Bartholomew, who documented Samudaya activities, says, "The purpose was twofold; to get to know people at the grassroots level, to learn, experience and evaluate the scene at first hand, and to use theatre as an instrument of education, as an attack on feudal and semi-feudal values" (Qtd. in Deshpande, Sudhanva 1997, p. 13).

Chennai Kalai Kuzhu, Tamil Nadu

Of all the street theatre groups in Tamil Nadu, Chennai Kalai Kuzhu is perhaps the only actively consistent street theatre group based in Chennai. Chennai Kalai Kuzhu was formed in September 1984 by some members (of whom Pralayan is the most visible) of the Tamil Nadu Progressive Writers' Association. Like Samudaya, they started with a proscenium play, *Nangul Varugirom* (Here we come), which was partially influenced by the Tamil folk form *Terukoothu*, in which a story in narrated with song, dance and mime with the accompaniment of musical instruments like harmonium, tabla, flute and dhol. Realistic acting was mixed with this traditional fare. The content was inspired by real incidents and

included comments on the plight of workers and police atrocities. Their next play *Bhopal A.D.1990* dramatized the suffering of the survivors of the Bhopal Gas tragedy.

The group took to street theatre first when they came across the script of Janam's *Aurat*, adapted it and successfully performed. Samudaya initially helped them understand the genre. But the real impetus to do street theatre came when some of its members were trained along with the members of Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad, which had been using street theatre format in its jathas to popularise ideas of science, and wanted to take these jathas to Tamil Nadu. Chennai Kalai Kuzhu performed their street play after getting trained and the street theatre form appealed to them. In the process the group also acquired its own identity such as having a uniform for all its actors during the performances. Pralayan attributes this to the influence of Meyerhold (74). Their interaction during the National Festival of Street Theatre in Delhi with street theatre groups across the country and with theatre personalities like M.K.Raina, Habib Tanvir, and Moloyashree Hashmi further broadened their horizon. The group also participated in a big way in the literacy movement and the campaign against female infanticide through street theatre in association with Tamil Nadu Science Forum.

Chennai Kalai Kuzhu's unique membership composition – there are bank and insurance employees, auto-drivers, teachers – represents the cross section of the society to a large extent. This heterogeneity helps the team to discuss and understand a social issue (to be dealt in a street play) from multiple vantage points (Pralayan 73). Similarly their commitment to make everybody in their team aware

of the issue on hand helps in spontaneous improvisations without deviating from the perspective through which the issue is presented. Most of the members being also members of the Progressive Writers' Association with a leftist ideology, they understand that street theatre is a genre that is deeply political and its major purpose is to enter into a conversation with people.

Women's Theatre

One of the most effective street theatre groups that worked on women's issues, albeit for a brief period, was Theatre Union in Delhi. It was an extension of a women's collective called Stree Sangharsh. Started by theatre scholars and activists, Anuradha Kapoor, Maya Kapoor and Rati Bartholomew, Theatre Union started with a street play on bride-burning. The play named *Om Swaha* became so popular all over India that it has been produced hundreds of times in slums, villages and colleges, since its first production in 1979. "It is generally considered one of the first major events of India's developing women's theatre" (van Ervin 1992, p.119). Their second play *Dafa 180* meant for creating awareness among people about the rights of women in police custody.

Another major women's street theatre group was Alarippu founded by Kamla Bhasin and Tripurari Sharma. Alarippu conducted theatre of liberation workshops for women all over India with the aim of establishing a network of community women's theatre groups (Ibid.120).

Other prominent Street Theatre Practitioners

In the context of dealing with communal issues, a powerful model can be found in Gursharan Singh, known as 'Samrat of nukkad natak' (emperor of street theatre) and his Amritsar Natak Kala Kendra in Punjab (Kang). Though he started his journey with IPTA, eventually he came to adopt CPI (ML) ideology. His plays like *Sadharan Log* (on peaceful co-existence of Hindus and Sikhs), *Dharam Mamla Nij Da* and *Baba Bolda Hai* (on Sikh fundamentalism) stood for fundamental political rights and even in dangerous circumstances opposed "communalism, factionalism, terrorism and political manipulation" (Scrampickal 118). His other street plays on similar themes include *Ik Kursi, Ik Morcha te Hawa vich Latke Lok*, *Curfew, Hitlist, Bhai Manna Singh, Chandigarh Puare di Jarh.* Atamjit Singh, himself a progressive Punjabi playwright, in his brief survey of Punjabi Drama, remarks about Gursharan Singh's street plays:

> There was no artistic quality in them, nothing that would make them a good example of professional theatre, yet they had a sway on the people. Gursharan Singh himself does not boast of their finesse, but he measures his success in terms of their delivery of a message. He represents the *Janvadi* (the people's) movement in Panjabi theatre (403).

Known for his personal courage and daring in keeping his group alive and inspired in the face of death threats from terrorists, Gursharan's strategy is to use the typical Punjabi action-songs which are less than plays, in the strict sense of the

term, nevertheless popular for their exuberance (Deshpande, Sudhanva 1997, p. 16).

Budhan Theatre in Ahmedabad was born from the anguish of members of a denotified tribe which has been ostracised since colonial times. Street theatre helped them recover their dignity and respect in society, even though the struggle with the suspicious authorities continues to be waged. Theatre changed the self-image of the younger generation of the community that participated in it. The social perception towards them so far had been that they were criminals. They considered themselves as such. Theatre had a therapeutic effect on them by helping them in constructing alternative models of looking at themselves in a more empowering and respectful light. Daxin Bajarange, the founder of Budhan Theatre, affirms that Gujarat was a place where theatre was badly needed. (105-107, 114)

Atish is one of the upcoming street theatre groups in Delhi. In a personal interview by this researcher, one of its founders, Ankita Anand, opined that street theatre is being seriously used by socially conscious college students as well as working men and women to make an intervention in slums and educational institutions on issues like women's hygiene, anti-sedition, anti-child labour, children education, and usage of solar energy. She says, though the performers may not have affiliation or sympathies with any particular political party or ideology, they do street theatre by way of sharing what they know with people who may not know. The simple format of street theatre suits them. Ankita is also not averse to the growing trend in metropolitan colleges and schools of conducting street theatre

competitions. In fact, she feels such occasions sharpen the format. As street theatre is generally topical in nature, one should quickly research a topic for performance and update the audience (Anand).

In the changing socio-political conditions in West Bengal, Swapnasandhini, a theatre group in Kolkata, took up street theatre seriously (Sen 48-49). Street theatre in Bihar, during emergency and after, was influenced by IPTA. Sanjay Upadhyay's experience with street theatre showed its possibility of reforming a community – he worked with Dalit boys in a ghetto and saved them from becoming criminals (Upadhyay 49-51).

Erstwhile Andhra Pradesh

In the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, street theatre was mainly popularised by Praja Natya Mandali, which was affiliated to IPTA right from the inception of the latter in 1943. Dr Raja Rao who was one of the founders of Praja Natya Mandali was a member of the Central Committee of IPTA. The amount of street theatre production in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh was considered to be the maximum in India (Deshpande, Sudhanva 1997, p. 17). Street theatre in the Andhra state (before the merger of the Hyderabad State) was definitely adopted for political propaganda by Praja Natya Mandali, affiliated to the Communist Party, from the traditional form of *Veedhi Bhagavatam* (Satyanarayana 133). Probably the first street theatre production was *Hitler Patanam*, an anti-fascist street play, written by Koganti. Jayaprabha has this to say about its production:

> The street play *Hitler* was shaped under the training by Kuchipudi artistes. Mikkilineni Radhakrishna Murti, Chadalawada and Kesava Rao used to play the roles of Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo respectively. Its playwright Koganti Gopalakrishnaiah along with Kosuri Punnaiah acted as the *Sutradhar* (narrator). This street play used to be enacted in the traditional Kuchipudi style. In the climax, Dr. Raja Rao as the Red Soldier used to perform a fierce dance with a sickle and a hammer, and kill Hitler. This climax and the play as a whole attracted large crowds – thousands of them used to congregate at Gandhinagar Gymkhana grounds in Vijayawada to watch this play (131 – *translation mine*).

The other street plays of Praja Natya Mandali during this initial phase included *Simla Bhagavatam* (on the British conspiracy behind partition), *Telangana Bhagavatham* (on the oppressive regime of the Nizam), and *Perigadi Rajyam* (on the compromising politics of the Congress Party). The state level cultural squad of Mandali, comprising artistes such as Koganti, Mikkilineni, Dr. Raja Rao, Kosuri Punnaiah and Umamaheswara Rao, toured in various districts and conducted rigorous workshops in the production of street plays and other folk art forms. Each of the district level cultural squads trained in these workshops used to form many more squads on their own (Ibid. 132). Praja Natya Mandali's stage plays like *Maa Bhumi* and *Mundadugu*, written by the duo Sunkara Satyanarayana and Vasireddy Bhaskara Rao with revolutionary content were very popular. *Maa Bhumi* became hugely successful even when it was performed in cities like Ahmedabad, Bombay, Poona and Sholapur.

Although Praja Natya Mandali used street plays and stage plays in aiding the Communist Party in the latter's land struggles and in the Telangana Armed Peasant Struggle, it used other art forms such as *Burra Katha* and song more successfully. APNM was disbanded in 1948 when the Communist Party itself was banned. The division in the Communist Party into Communist Party of India (CPI) and Communist Party of India (Marxist) in 1964 also led to a division in Praja Natya Mandali – Andhra Pradesh Praja Natya Mandali affiliated to CPI was formed in 1974 and Andhra Praja Natya Mandali affiliated to CPI (M) was formed around the same time (Satyanarayana 203). While Praja Natya Mandali in its earlier phase reflected the united Community Party's line, the now active Andhra Praja Natya Mandali reflects the line of Communist Party of India (Marxist), which has been, in terms of cadre and electoral success, more powerful and popular than the residual Communist Party of India.

It was with the martyrdom of Safdar Hashmi in 1989 that Andhra Praja Natya Mandali, revived street theatre in its artistic repertoire on a large scale (Deshpande, Sudhanva 1997, p.17). The organisation has been conducting State level street theatre festival, called SHOT (Safdar Hashmi Open Theatre). It has also published ten street plays in Telugu (Satyanarayana 209). Andhra Praja Natya Mandali worked in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh through street theatre on many issues of the working class, Dalits and adivasis. Their street theatre highlighted the issues of landless Dalit women labourers (on account of being landless, being Dalit, being women and being labourers) and the various layers of exploitation they suffer. Andhra Praja Natya Mandali represented the threat of displacement Adivasis were facing in Visakhapatnam district in Andhra Pradesh through their

street theatre that incorporated the traditional dances and songs of the Adivasis. Along with Dalit youth Andhra Praja Natya Mandali performed street plays against the atrocities of upper caste landlords in Anantapur district. They also dealt with other serious issues like child-trafficking prevalent in seventeen districts of the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh (Devi 103-104).

The Jana Natya Mandali, formed in 1972, propagates more militant Marxist-Leninist-Maoist politics, reflecting a further division in the Communist Party brought about by the Naxalbari Revolt in 1967. The armed struggle line of the Communist Party followed by the leaders of Naxalbari immediately influenced the Srikakulam Armed Peasant struggle. The leaders of this struggle, Vempatapu Satyam and Subbarao Panigrahi, themselves used the local folk art forms like *Jamukula Katha* to inspire the masses for the armed struggle against the feudal exploitation. Subbarao Panigrahi wrote and sang several powerful revolutionary songs. Inspired by their example and the ideology of the Srikakulam Struggle a few individuals like B. Narsing Rao (known for his award winning films like *Dasi* and *Ranguala Kala*) and Gaddar started a cultural organisation called the Art Lovers at Alwal in the outskirts of Secunderabad. Jana Natya Mandali arose from this society with a clear agenda of propagating the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology through art forms (Jayaprabha 174). Gaddar's song performance has since become legendary and continues to inspire audience even today. He used to write the lyrics, compose them in folk tunes and perform them in a dramatic manner. Similarly Vangapandu Prasada Rao from Visakhapatnam, who was also a member of Jana Natya Mandali, became famous as a writer and performer of songs and street plays.

Street play is the other art form that Jana Natya Mandali made use of for their propaganda. While Gaddar's songs provoked emotions, Vangapandu's street play, *Bhumi Bhagotam*, produced first in 1977, made spectators think. This street play, set in rural Andhra, exposes the exploitative and oppressive nexus of the political parties, the state machinery and the local landlords and their atrocities against small landowners and agricultural labourers. The play was successful in dramatizing contemporary socio-political reality with a judicious mix of stylization from the folk art form of *Jalari Bhagotam* popular in the villages of Srikakulam district. Jayaprabha in her study of this street play opines that the stylization provided a Brechtian effect to the performance, as a result of which the spectators, instead of getting absorbed in the dramatic illusion, get to think about the issues being unpacked by the plot (183).

Apart from these major cultural organisations, there were many others in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh which practised street theatre effectively. It is significant to note that all such organisations happen to be either front or affiliated organisations of a left party or practised this genre at least with strong sympathies with some line of Communism.

'Arunodaya' was one such organisation formed on 16 August 1973 with aims similar to those of Jana Natya Mandali. Though initially they performed the earlier plays of Praja Natya Mandali such as *Maa Bhumi* and *Mundadugu*, gradually started adapting earlier street plays to suit contemporary politics. The street play *Simla Bhagavatam* was adapted as *Pragathi* (on how the post-Independence

Congress Party became exploitative and how the Communist Parties compromised on their ideals) and performed in the *Yakshagana* style. This was again adapted as *Indirajaalam* exposing Indira Gandhi's politics. Arunodaya used to perform Vangapandu's *Bhumi Bhagotam* and a street play adaptation of K.G.Satyamurty's poem *Chelli Chandrammaa* (Jayaprabha 187). Another cultural organisation called Navodaya which was affiliated to the Revolutionary Writers Association (*Virasam*) in 1972 later split from *Virasam* and formed as Jana Sahiti Samskritika Samaakhya in 1978. Jana Sahiti gave a number of performances of several street plays such as *Appula Bharatam* (on the indebtedness of India) and *Ramajanmabhoomi Kaaduro* (a bitter satire on Communal politics) in the *Veedhi Bhagavatam* style (Satyanarayana 220-221).

At a distance from these left wing organisations, Pasupuleti Purnachandra Rao's unique experimental practice of theatre reflects the influence of Badal Sircar and Augusto Boal. He made several experiments in this genre. Initially a film-enthusiast involved in awareness building activities in rural Andhra through film shows, Purnachandra Rao turned to theatre through the influence of his friend Tripurari Sharma through whom he came into contact with Badal Sircar. He brought Badal Sircar to Hyderabad for conducting workshops in Sircar's techniques of the Third Theatre (His process of preparing a play with a community is described in Chapter I). *Mannemlo* is a two-hour play that Purnachandra Rao produced in Sircar's style, involving the Adivasis of East Godavari district of the present Andhra Pradesh. The successful street plays that he produced include *Pipeelikam* and *Manuvu-Maanushi* (Jayaprabha 196).

There are other experimentalists (who did not work directly with any movement) like Purnachandra Rao who experimented with the street theatre 'technique' especially in the University Departments of Theatre Arts. Attili Krishna Rao started his association with street theatre with the production of the Telugu translation of the Badal Sircar's *Juloos*. He went on to produce street plays such as *Jantarmantar Maamoollu,* and *Tommy,Tommy,Tommy* at Andhra University. Similarly, Akella Satyanarayana Murthy's *Peddabalasiksha* and Tanikella Bharani's *Gograhanam* were performed in Osmania University as street plays. Dr Prasada Reddy, who was awarded a doctorate for his study on Street Theatre, said in a personal interview with this researcher that he was a member of the first team to enact *Gograhanam* and later became an important resource person in the training of Left wing cultural organisations like Andhra Praja Natya Mandali.

Though Purnachandra Rao claims Boal's influence, it may be due to the partial fulfilment of Boal's technique – Purnachandra Rao's activism is not on the same scale as of Jana Sanskriti for instance – that his experimental theatre in Telugu appears to be confined to his experiments and have not become directly influential on activism, at least, as yet. This is not to deny the academic experimentalists' contribution. It is certainly possible that some of these experiments and the resultant expertise, as a resource, indirectly influence (for example through trainings for activists) cultural organisations that are consistently working with a political agenda. The value of the space for academic experiments lies to a great extent in this contribution.

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Most of the practitioners of street theatre described above have been motivated in their practice either by their commitment to a cause or the experiments in the art form. However, as was pointed out in the previous chapter, street theatre is now being used by the government and the non-governmental organisations as part of their outreach or communication strategy. While some funding agencies of NGOs insist on including such strategy in project proposals to be considered for funding, the government agencies even invite 'sealed quotations' from reputed parties for organising street plays on a given theme - Sudhanva Deshpande refers to such an instance in the Department of Family Welfare, Ministry of Health, Government of India (3). Describing how street theatre is stripped of its theatrical quality during its commodification, Sudhanva Deshpande observes:

> Every art, upon entering the market, becomes commodified, but is still perceived more or less as art. Street theatre, on the other hand, undergoes a fundamental transformation: it turns into advertising. It does not advertise consumer products – though, reportedly, in Nepal even that has happened – it advertises social messages. There are many, many groups which produce this kind of 'theatre' and they sell a variety of messages: family planning, hygiene, protection against AIDS, the evils of drink and even, I'm told, how to cross a road. Not all work for the government; many work for NGOs and often NGOs themselves undertake such social advertising (1997, p.4).

Street theatre also received a boost from the literacy movement, which involved a large number of youth in performing street plays for educating people on uses of literacy. But such street plays again betray their lack of any regard for the genre – they sermonise, they tend to talk down to people that they address, instead of engaging them artistically and through dialogue, and their conception of literacy is narrow (Ibid. 4-5).

The neglect of the aesthetics is not unique to government and non-governmental agencies that work with street theatre with a project-approach. Even the politically motivated groups have not been very careful about their craft. Part of their negligence may be explained by the fact that there is no strong people's movement of which street theatre could be a part, which seems to be a necessary condition for their motivation to sharpen the craft. As Makarand Sathe exclaims: "With most people's movements facing crisis, [agit-prop] theatre too is in the same state. I am in favour of agit-prop theatre – even at times leaning towards propaganda. But I am afraid that the tendency to simplify issue, and need to see things in black and white is becoming counter-productive when issues tend to be more in the grey area" (132).

Echoing the concerns of many people about the quality and relevance of street theatre and responding to them, G.P. Deshpande, a veteran Marathi political playwright and scholar, provides a realistic perspective:

> Let us be clear about it. Theatre does not change the world. A changing world benefits from the theatre. If we do not have forces working to

> change the world, what can theatre do? If, for instance, masses of people are not standing up to Modi, what can theatre do? Theatre works, when there is a strong political movement to begin with. Shahir Amar Sheikh's songs worked because there was the *lal bawta* (red flag), because there was the Mumbai Girni Kamgar Union. Today when the working class in Bombay has been decimated, the *lal bawta* is a distant memory, do you have any Amar Sheikhs or Annabhau Sathes or Gavankars? So, for heaven's sake, don't burden theatre with impossible expectations (226).

Absence of strong political movements need not bring stagnation and impotence to street theatre. There is still much that street theatre can do in the face growing economic divide in this country and, more importantly, the threat to its secular fabric. Some like the Third Theatre and Jana Sanskriti Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed took to working with communities in a constructive manner. This is certainly a creative option, but not the only one. Moloyashree Hashmi speaks on behalf of Janam, "We are not rooted in any particular community, but our work derives whatever value it may have from a larger alignment with the cause of the working class. I think this kind of larger connection is essential for anyone doing theatre" (141). The relevance of this larger connection in today's realm of fragmented identities is debatable, especially when tackling with monolithic categories like 'working class' become too heavy for an artist to deal with in any manner useful to the intended spectator.

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Chapter Four

A *Koshish* at Building Bridges

Street theatre has been used as one of the media by peace-builders in the old city of Hyderabad, for its ability to reach out to masses directly, mixing message with wholesome entertainment. Though, because of its direct contact and proximity of performance with audience, it posed certain risks to the performers depending on the message and the attitude of the audience in a particular locality, while working in tandem with other strategies for peace building it was safely practised and was considered effective by many of its practitioners.

The predominant theme of the street plays here has been communal harmony because of the immediacy of the problem of communal conflict to the lives and livelihoods of the city's inhabitants. So, in order to understand the significance of the use of street theatre in the old city of Hyderabad and to situate this genre in the local historical context, it is necessary to understand the unique historical and demographical factors of this region, which gave rise to the problem of communal conflict.

The cultural character of Hyderabad has its roots in its long history of composite culture and relatively shorter history of its people's struggles for a democratic and egalitarian society and governance. The years leading to the annexation of the Hyderabad State into the Union of India were marked by polarization of communities, communal strife and unprecedented violence owing to factors such

as the democratic aspirations of the citizens of Hyderabad State influenced by the freedom movement at its peak across the country, the consceintization process and anti-feudal peasant struggle led by the Communist Party. However, the revival and active use of art forms for awareness building and propaganda was a strategy used by the Communist Party during the Telangana Peasants' Armed Struggle. The struggle steered clear of communal politics and focussed on eradication of feudal oppression.

The region under study has been under the rule of various Muslim dynasties at least since circa 1300. It was originally under the Bahmanis. With the decline of the Bahmani dynasty, the kingdom broke into five principalities, viz., the Adil Shahi dynasty of Bijapur, the Imad Shahi dynasty of Berar, the Nizam Shahi dynasty of Ahmad Nagar, the Qutb Shahi dynasty of Golkonda, and the Barid Shahi dynasty of Bidar. Aurangzeb in his invasion of Golconda ended the Qutb Shahi rule. After the weakening of the Moghal empire following Aurangzeb's death, his governor at Golconda, Nizam ul Mulk, inaugurated the Asaf Jahi dynasty that ruled the Hyderabad State for 224 years through seven kings. It is under the rule of the Seventh Nizam that India achieved independence from the colonial rulers and in its wake annexed Hyderabad State by sheer force in what is euphemistically termed as 'police action'.

History of Communal Harmony and Conflict in the Deccan

Hyderabad founded by Qutb Shahi dynasty has a four centuries old history. The Qutb Shahis ruled for 175 years (1512 – 1687A.D) through seven kings. The Qutb

Shahis made Hyderabad their capital and ruled from Golconda. Their regime was characterised by a remarkable sense of religious tolerance. The Hindu festivals of Ugadi, Holi, Diwali, Sankranti, and Basant were respected by the Muslims, who participated in them enthusiastically, whereas the Hindus started worshipping *pir*s of the Shiite tradition, which continues to this day.

The Qutb Shahs treated Hindus and Muslims equally for employment in military, administrative and diplomatic purposes. Hindus rose even to the position of Peshwa during this time. Akkanna and Madanna, two Brahmin brothers dominated the administrative and military affairs of Golconda from 1672 till its absorption into the Mughal Empire in 1687.

Golconda patronised arts very generously. Since the rulers were themselves excellent artistes and fine connoisseurs of arts, Golconda was the intellectual resort of literary men. Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah was a renowned patron of art, literature and architecture. The founder of Hyderabad City, he built the enduring landmark, Char Minar. Besides, he left behind a rich legacy of his own poetry, in Deccani Urdu, Persian and Telugu, which is reputed to have brought in secular themes into poetry for the first time. 'Apart from the praise of God and the Prophet, he wrote about nature, love, and the social life of his day' (Chandra, 274). The Qutb Shahs also contributed a great deal to the growth of Urdu in its Deccani form. After Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, many other poets and writers of the time used this form of Urdu as the medium of their expression. Their Urdu drew on Hindi and Telugu for forms, idioms and themes as well as vocabulary. Sufis of the Deccan composed their works in Urdu. Ibrahim Adil Shah of Bijapur even

adopted Deccani as the Court Language. Urdu seems to have gone to the north Indian from the Deccan in the eighteenth century.

The Golconda state under the Qutb Shahs hardly experienced any sectarian violence while the northern parts of India were reeling under religious intolerance. The Qutb Shahs were able to set and maintain fine standards of communal harmony. During the Qutb Shahi dynasty, the Hindu population was fully assured of security of life and property. Furthermore, there was hardly any recorded evidence of forced conversions and people of every faith freely practised their own faith. The literature, architecture, social and religious rituals and ceremonies of the period was a harmonious mix of different traditions. An ancient temple of Shiva, which is still visited by the Hindu devotees, on the top of the summit of the Golconda fort built by Qutb Shahis for their Hindu subjects bears testimony to the religious tolerance of Qutb Shahs (Ahmad 176). The south Indian style of architecture discernible now in the Qutb Shahi tombs is also evidence of the synthesis achieved in culture during this period. Qutb Shahis thus paved the way for a composite culture which distinguished Hyderabad for a long time.

After it became a part of the Mughal Empire, the Governor of Golconda appointed by the Mughals, Mir Qamaruddin founded the Asaf Jahi dynasty in 1724 and declared independence from the weakening Mughal Empire after Aurangazeb. He called himself Nizam-ul-Mulk and became the first Nizam. The Asaf Jahi dynasty ruled till 1948 through seven kings as already pointed out. Asaf Jahs continued the Qutb Shahs' policy of communal harmony to a large extent, especially in their

early phase. They continued to entrust higher positions in administration to the Hindus along with their Muslim brethren (Moid et al).

Even after the British became active in India in their imperialist expansion, the Hyderabad State under the Nizams existed like an island of stability and harmony even in the midst of the revolts of local rulers and populace against them. The Nizams consistently maintained a stance of loyalty to the British. When Tipu Sultan of Mysore led a famous revolt against the British, even though he was a fellow Muslim, the then Nizam took to the British side. Tipu's spirit of revived Islam and his call for *jihad* against the British provoked no positive response from the Nizam (Ibid.)

Similarly in the 1857 first war of independence, the Nizam's pro-British policy was able to insulate the Hyderabad State from the patriotic wave that swept across the country. Hyderabad was in fact an important centre in the south for *Wahabis* who led a valiant battle after Tipu Sultan against the British government in 1857 and, according to some scholars, were instrumental in inspiring both the Muslim and Hindu soldiers in the British army (Ashraf 100). The Wahabi movement, in which even Hindus participated in large numbers, was a strong indication of the resentment of some sections of society against the British rule and a desire for self-rule. When Prince Mubariz-ud-Doula, brother of the Nizam, himself was declared by Wahabis as their leader in India, he started contacting other Nawabs like that of Kurnool for a concerted attack on the British. But he was arrested in time by the Nizam at the insistence of the British Resident in Hyderabad, General Fraser (Regani 252-54). The movement in Hyderabad against the British was led

by Turrabaz Khan and Maulavi Allauddin, while the Nizam himself was appealing to his subjects not to entertain the ideology of the movement, more to avoid displeasing the British than any apprehensions about the movement. The Wahabis organised an audacious attack of soldiers on the British Residency, but failed miserably. Many Wahabis were arrested. Turrabaz Khan was shot dead and Maulavi was deported to Andamans. Similarly there were revolts of the Contingent force at Aurangabad and rebellion and conspiracies in the various districts in the dominions of the Nizam against the British, but these were quickly and violently suppressed by the British and with unstinted loyalty to the British of the then Nizam, Afzal-ud-Doula, and the prime minister Salar Jung I. In return, "the knighthood of the "Most Exalter Order" was conferred on the Nizam" by the British (Regani 323).

Otherwise, there was not much of political activity under the monarchy of the Nizam. It is believed that Chanda Railway Scheme agitation in 1870 was the first public agitation in the State. When the Indian Government and the Nizam Government reached an agreement on constructing a railway line from Wadi on Madra-Bombay route to Hyderabad, some prominent members of the civil society petitioned to the Nizam about its possible loss to the State and requested the government to reveal details of the agreement (Moid et al).

Until Mir Mahboob Ali Khan's regime, the religious policy of the Nizams was truly a model one. However, during this regime, some controversial orders by the government with regard to celebration of festivals created ill feelings among the majority community. When Muslim and Hindu festivals coincided, the ruler

thought it wise to restrict one from public celebration to avoid conflicts. But his decision left the Hindus with a sense of discrimination. It was this discontent among the Hindus that Arya Samaj which entered Hyderabad in 1892 made much of. Though it was fundamentally a religious reform organisation, Arya Samaj took up political activity. Its reformist teachings propagated with missionary zeal enraged the traditional Hindus as well as the Muslim. Owing to its incendiary ways of conducting public debates and lectures, the government had to clamp restrictions on the organisation and deport its preachers (Ibid.).

The suspicions between the two communities, between the government and the majority community grew even more after Ganesh Utsav celebrations were started on a public scale in 1895 in the Hyderabad State. These celebrations had been introduced in Maharashtra by Bal Gangadhar Tilak for uniting all Hindus as part of the independence movement. But in Hyderabad they came to be associated with Arya Samaj's activities (Ibid.).

Modernisation of India with the influence of English education and colonial rule started showing its impact on Hyderabad also especially since 1900. On one hand one could see the growing response of the civil society in its awareness of its rights in the emergence of several newspapers, organisations, movements, unions, and agitations, and on the other hand the positive response of the government in starting new educational institutions and liberalising the polity (Ibid.).

However the period after Mir Osman Ali Khan ascended the throne of the Hyderabad State as the seventh Nizam was characterised by unprecedented social

upheavals beyond the imagination of the medieval society. Hyderabad State could not survive as an island on its own while the rest of the subcontinent was eagerly looking forward to a new era of independence and a modern nation state (or two nation states as it turned out to be). The period also saw unprecedented polarisation of Muslim and Hindu identities due partly to radical communal propaganda on both sides (Ibid.).

For instance, the Nizam's orders in 1917 restricting Dasserah celebrations that coincided with Moharram were perceived by Hindu outfits such as Arya Samaj not as preventive measures to avoid communal clashes but as deliberate suppression of religious freedom of the Hindus. That the Hindu officials themselves were involved in drafting the orders did not help in improving the perception (Ibid.).

In reaction to communalisation of the Hindu society, communal polarisation of Muslim also grew during this period giving rise to organisations such as Dindar Anjuman under Siddiq Dindar and Majlis-E-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen under Bahadur Yar Jung. As a result, communal clashes between Hindus and Muslims became frequent since 1936 due to provocations from these three communal organisations (Ratna Naidu, Ashutosh Varshney quoted in Moid et al). In the 1930s and 1940s these clashes acquired a more organised nature.

The Khilafat movement that brought about unity of Muslims and Hindus in Hyderabad for a brief spell had been a far cry from these clashes. This movement also brought national politics and the freedom movement into the Hyderabad

State. The Freedom Movement led by Indian National Congress influenced many intellectuals and students of the Hyderabad State. The Vande Mataram Movement in the State was able to inspire a large number of people against the rule of the British and of their ally the Nizam. Gandhi's Non-Cooperation and Swadeshi movements had a great impact on the idealistic youth of the Hyderabad State. When Hyderabad State Congress was formed in 1938, of which Mulla Abdul Qayyum was the first member, the Nizam imposed a ban on it only to lift it as late as April 1946. It is this restriction of Congress from operating in Hyderabad, and Congress's own reluctance to interfere in the affairs of the Hyderabad State that might have given rise to communal elements dominating the leadership positions in the State (Sundarayya 4).

The Hyderabad State represented four linguistic communities speaking Urdu, Telugu, Kannada and Marathi. Though the Freedom Movement cut across these linguistic communities in its influence, three of them had formed separate bodies, namely, Andhra Mahasabha (initially Andhra Jana Sabha) formed in 1921, Karnataka Parishad (1934), and Maharashtra Parishad (1936) to represent the specific issues of their respective communities. Majlis became the sole representative of the Muslim population. After the leadership of Majlis passed on to Kasim Razvi in 1944, the party became more fanatic. The Razakars trained by Razvi became notorious for their atrocities.

It is worthwhile to note that not all supporters for the Razakars were Muslims. There were also Hindu landlords who patronised Razakars. At the same time, not

all Muslims were supporters of the fanatic and aggressive approach of the Razakars and the Majlis (Moid et al).

While defending the monarchy of the Nizam against any revolts by the people was the aim of the Majlis, the mission of the anti-Nizam activities was mixed up in religious and nationalistic interests. We should also note here that the inhuman exploitation that the toiling masses of the State, whether Muslim or Hindu, suffered at the hands of landlords of a medieval mentality escaped the attention of the Congress itself and all these communal organisations.

Telangana Peasants' Armed Struggle

It is only when the Andhra Mahasabha was captured by the Communists in the eleventh Mahasabha in 1944 that this gross oversight was sought to be corrected. The Telangana People's Struggle, led under the guidance of the Communist Party of India, Andhra Unit, inspired such peasants' struggles across the world, though it lasted in its intense form only for five years, that is, from 1946 to 1951. The Struggle not only questioned the quality of independence that India had been seeking from the colonisers, but also laid foundations for future struggles to be waged by the working class of India against ruling classes of all hues. Though it was the Nizam and his landlords the people fought at this historical point, it was not a struggle for the supremacy of a religion or culture (like the agitations or movements of Arya Samaj or Majlis). It was waged against the exploiting class by the deprived peasants belonging to all religions and all castes. It was a saga of great courage and great sacrifices.

Inequalities, economic and cultural, reached inhuman proportions, especially in the rural areas of the Hyderabad State during the 1940s. As always in history, such unjust society became the breeding ground for communal passions. In the Muslim rule the Hindus perceived gross injustice being meted out to their languages – Telugu, Kannada, Marathi – and the hegemony of Urdu prevented the spread of literacy which was abysmally low in Nizam's dominions. Almost all the upper echelons of the administrative hierarchy were seized by Muslims. The Communist Party however tore through this communal mask and pointed at the impoverished Muslim peasantry and artisans, most of whom became foot soldiers of the great Struggle.

The landlord heard
The knell strike of his days
Reverberating dark and certain doom.....
The bent back of the village
On which his father rode, on which himself
He had been riding for a dozen years
And thought to ride for full two dozen more;
The bent back of the village
Had, of a sudden, thrilled and grown erect,
The village stood erect, its blood turned sap,
Its nerves turned harp strings of new-humming faith.

Thus sang Harindranath Chattopadhyay during the Telangana peasants' armed struggle in his poem "Tales of Telangana" (Sundarayya 442 – the entire poem reproduced in Appendix IV of Sundarayya 424-458).

Ideas of socialism and communism captivated the imagination of educated youth in the 1930s and 1940s. They seemed to provide a way out of the deadlock that Indian feudal society was facing. Though the nationalist fervour was the predominant spirit in the country, the future still looked bleak to all those who looked beyond the independence from the colonial rule. It is one of the ironies of history that Nehru's own socialist ideas in his early years inspired several youth to adopt radical communist ideology.

Though communal forces dominated in the urban centres during this period, Communism also had staunch followers in these centres. Makhdoom Mohiuddin, based in Hyderabad, was one such youth. Apart from the propaganda of the Communist Party, winds of revolution were also being transmitted to Hyderabad through literary medium. Akhtar Hussain Raipuri's translation of Nazrul Islam into Urdu brought, for one, the Hyderabadi Urdu readership into contact with revolutionary ideas (Gour, "Makhdoom" 43). Under Nazrul's influence, Makhdoom's poetry too reflected the perception of the progressive forces of his day. Just like Harindranath's, Makhdoom's poetry also aspired to be the harbinger of a progressive change. In his poem *Baaghi* (The Rebel) he writes in his fiery style:

Tor daaloongaa main zanjeer-i aseeraan-i qafas

Dair ko panjah-i usrat se chraane de mujhe

Tafraqe mazhab-o-millat ke mitaane de mujhe

Aag hun aag hun, haan aik dahakti hui aag

Aag hun aag, bas ab aag lagaane de mujhe

I will break open the chains of the prisoners

Let me liberate the world from the clutches of poverty.

And erase the divisions of faith and communities

I am fire, I am fire, yes, a blazing fire

I am fire, all fire, let me set all ablaze. (Quoted in Moazzam 91; emphases mine.)

Makhdoom's was a refreshing voice amidst the unimaginably claustrophobic society of Hyderabad. His humane outlook surpassed the narrow categories of one's faith and community and reached out to the suffering lot. Though he, like many of his ilk, was never overtly critical of any faith – that was then not on their agenda – he was subtly driving his point about the regressive nature of narrow identities and superficial concerns, while basic existential issues of hunger and shelter plagued a majority of the country. In another famous poem, *Haveli* (1938), he takes the steam out of the decadent feudal system, at which many of his fellow citizens were still fondly looking:

Ek baseeda haveli ya'ni farsooda samaaj

Le rahi hae naz'a ke 'aalam men murdon se khiraaj

Ek musalasal karb men doobey hu'e sam baam-o-dar

Jis taraf dekho andhera, jis taraf dekho khandar

Maar-o-kazdum kaa thikaana jis ki deevaron ke chaak

Uf! Yeh rakhne – kis qadar taareek, kitne haulnaak

Jin men rahte haen mahaajan, jin men baste haen ameer

Jin me Kaashi ke Brahman, jin men Ka'be ke faqeer

A dilapidated mansion, a system on its last legs

Taking tributes from the dead in the last throes of its life

Doors and windows drowned in perpetual pain

Darkness envelopes everything, ruins all around

Cracked walls, abodes of snakes and scorpions

How frighteningly deep and dark the crevices

Sheltering the moneylender, the rich

The Brahmins of Kashi, and the Faqirs of Ka'aba (Ibid 95)

The *haveli* is a straightforward symbol of the society of the bygone era. By making it at the same time both an 'abode of snakes and scorpions' and that which is "sheltering the moneylender, the rich," and the Brahmins and Faqirs, Makhdoom is clearly exposing the toxic grip of these 'elite sections' of the society on the system. In depicting it being in ruins, Makhdoom offers hope for an egalitarian and healthy society the inauguration of which was just round the corner. Such was the optimism of his generation. Makhdoom's genuine romantic

sensibility, reflected in many of his poems, did not find it hard to embrace socialism, but readily empathised sensitively with victims of inequalities in an unjust system across the world.

Makhdoom was no armchair poet. He was an active participant in the Telangana Armed Struggle. Giving up his secure career as a lecturer, he took to organising trade unions in Hyderabad as a fulltime worker with the Communist Party of India and its trade union wing All India Trade Union Congress. Operating under difficult circumstances in a banned political party, he went on to win the Assembly election from Huzurnagar after he was released from jail (Gour, "Makhdoom" 49).

Speaking of the trends in Urdu literature contemporary to Makhdoom, Raj Bahadur Gour recalls:

> The All India Conference of Progressive Writers, held in Hyderabad in 1945, was a landmark event. The presence of luminaries like Hasrat Mohani, Firaq Gorakhpuri, Ehtesham Hussain, Qazi Abdul Gaffar, Krishen Chander, Wamiq Jaunpuri, Dr. Abdul Aleem, Sibte Hassan, and others and the discussions that took place at this conference inspired a whole generation of writers. Abid Ali Khan, Mahboob Hussain Jigar, and many others belong to this family. It may be said that the Conference marked the heights of Urdu literature. Makhdoom's collection of poems *Surkh Savera* (The Red Dawn), which contained a whole spectrum of poetry, from innocent romances to inspiring revolutionary poetry, marks the beginning

> of this more politicized literary consciousness in Hyderabad" (Gour, "Trends" 177).

Gour also briefly acknowledges that "Urdu drama received a fillip due to the activities of the students' unions, aided by Zafarul Hassan, Mir Hassan, and Makhdoom" (Ibid 177).

This period also saw the emergence of several newspapers, some of which like 'Imroze' were fearlessly outspoken in their critique of fanaticism and the old feudal order and in their advocacy of an egalitarian and democratic social order. The editor of Imroze, Shoibullah Khan, published a statement by a group of nationalist Muslim intellectuals such as Manzoor Jung, Mulla Abdhul Basit, Syed Mohammed Hussain Jaffery, Bakharali Mirza, Ahmed Mirza, Fareed Mirza, and Hussain Abdul Musade, against the growing Razakar atrocities and Nizam's support to these fanatic forces. Shoibullah Khan also wrote an editorial in support of this statement. As a result he was brutally killed by the Razakars on 22 August 1948 less than a month before the 'police action' (Narasinga Rao 282).

As was to be expected the landlords were supported in their attacks on the revolutionary peasantry first by the Nizam's police and Razakars, and later by the armed forces of the Union of India. Several participants and survivors of the Struggle vividly documented the atrocities of the Nizam's police, Razakars and the Indian army (Narasimhulu 93-108, 175-185; Narayanareddy 34-40; Narasingarao 294-295). In Nalgonda district alone, 240 villages were raided, 64 women were

raped of whom two were killed, 22 were shot dead and 8,507 were arrested, 15,385 were harassed (D.Venkateswara Rao's report in Gour, *Tricolour* 23-28).

It is important for us to examine the cultural consequences of this Struggle in the context of this thesis, as it spawned several creative uses of folk art forms for propagating revolutionary ideas among people. Though written forms were also used for this propagation, such as pamphlets, poems, newspaper articles, short stories, and novels, such forms were meant more for the consumption of the educated middle class, whose sympathy, opinion-making power and leadership were important for the struggle. The Telugu literary movement and the library movement by Komarraju Lakshmana Rao, Ravichettu Ranga Rao and Garicharla Hari Sarvottama Rao were again restricted in their influence to urban centres and the educated middle class. However, as the principal participants were to be the actual victims of oppression, who were illiterate, it was necessary for the leaders and organisers of the Struggle to inspire and mobilise them, for which the only tools, apart from mere speeches and conversations, available were oral and visual cultural art forms. The folk art forms infused with contemporary, progressive and revolutionary content in the place of their traditional content, which dealt with religious themes or popular legends, has been referred to by modern researchers as people's literature (Tirumala Rao x). This is distinguished from folk literature that carried traditional content. Thus the Telangana Peasants' Armed Struggle gave rise to abundant 'people's literature', the oral forms of which were only partly documented by excellent researchers like Jayadheer Tirumala Rao.

Praja Natya Mandali, the cultural wing of the Communist Party was at the forefront of the creation of people's literature and its propagation during the Struggle. As mentioned in Chapter III, Praja Natya Mandali (PNM) started in 1943 as an off shoot and local chapter of Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) affiliated to the Communist Part of India, Andhra Unit. In Putchalapalli Sundarayya's words, "The Communist Party had revived languishing cultural forms like *burra katha, veedhi bhagavatham,* et cetera, and through them approached the masses. Hundreds of squads and drama groups functioned all over Andhra. Through these cultural forms, stories of peasants' lives, biographies of national heroes, militant struggles of the Andhra people, heroic exploits of the Soviet guerrillas, were all popularised" (106). Just as the leaders such as Chandra Rajeswara Rao of the Andhra Unit were the guiding force behind the Struggle, PNM too guided the formation of the cultural squads comprising cadre of the party for taking forward the Struggle.

PNM brought not only several folk art forms like *Burra Katha* and *Veedhi Bhagotam* from across the border from the Andhra State, but also creatively used the art forms indigenous to Telangana, such as *Gollasuddalu, Bahurupalu, Sarada Kathalu, Pichuka Kuntla Kathalu* and *Koyadora* to inspire people for a revolution. *Burrakatha* was used very effectively by PNM artistes such as Nazar and Sunkara Satyanarayana. Sunkara's *Kashtajeevi* (The Toiler), a *Burrakatha*, was banned by the government for its inciting content. Nazar was a great *Burrakatha* performer, one of his famous *Burrakatha*s being *Moscow Polimeralona* (In the outskirts of Moscow). Although this art form was brought from the Andhra region it soon caught the imagination of the Telangana writers

and artists. Tirunagari Ramanjaneyulu wrote *Burrakatha*s like *Telangana Veerayodhulu*. Aduri Ayodhya Rama, Chandavarapu Vishwanatham and S.K. Chaudhary also wrote *Burrakatha*s on the atrocities of the Nizam's police and of Razakars and highlighted the exploitation of the landlords. Sunkara's Burrakatha *Telangana* immoratalised Bandagi, a Muslim peasant who was killed for his heroic opposition to the landlord Visnur Deshmukh (Satyanarayana 116).

Similarly, other folk art forms like *Golla Suddulu, Oggu Katha, Harikatha, Phakir Paatalu, Bairagi Paatalu, Dandakam, Latkorusab, Chuttakamudu, Vuyyala Paatalu,* and *Sarada Kathalu* were transformed to convey revolutionary message instead of the original religious content. For example, in the traditional form of *Phakir Paatalu*, the Pakeer, a Sufi mendicant, exhorted his audience to believe in God. But in the PNM form, he typically started his song with the lines "*Insaniyat par Yakin rakho, hamari bat suno'*. In the new version, he appealed for a faith in humanity (Dhanaraju 4). Similarly the Bairagi Paatalu, songs by a Hindu mendicant, in the hands of PNM now conveyed philosophical observations not about the liberation of the soul, but about people's liberation from the oppression.

The genre that was most popular during the Struggle was, of course, the song. The Telangana working class culture is extremely rich in its repertoire of songs, which working men and women sang while working in the fields, while carrying out household chores, on special occasions like festivals, marriages, births and deaths. These were reverently received by the revolutionary poets such as Tirunagari Ramanjaneyulu, Suddala Hanumanthu, and Yadagiri and recreated them with revolutionary content. Because of the familiarity of the tunes and refrains, the

songs immediately connected with the audience and the content transmitted instantaneously creating appropriate response in them. The revolutionary songs endeared the Struggle to the peasantry of Telangana.

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Another significant genre that became popular during the Peasant Struggle was the 'street play', known as *Veedhi Natakam* or *Veedhi Bhagotam*. Again, the genre was infused with revolutionary message replacing the traditional mythological substance. A street play by name, *Vetti Chakiri* (Bonded Labour), was supposed to be the first such social play to come out during this period (Tirumala Rao quoted in Dhanaraju 6; Mikkilineni quoted in Satyanarayana 197). Bonded labour was clearly one of the most important concerns of the peasantry of Telangana. The peasants used to contribute their manual labour almost free of cost to landlords for generations together, without hope of liberation. One of the achievements of this struggle was the abolition of bonded labour, first by the revolutionary forces and later by the Government of India. This first street play performed in 1943 was also the first performance of the cultural squad of Praja Natya Mandali formed under the aegis of Andhra Mahasabha. The plot of the street play involved a bonded labourer who used to take a bundle of firewood to the *ameen* of a police station on a daily basis. One day he goes to the police station without the bundle. When the *ameen* asks him why, the labourer stuns him by showing his membership receipt from Andhra Mahasabha and tells him that since he is a member of the *Sangham* he will no longer bring the firewood. The message was to defy the authority of the *deshmukhs.* The same team performed the street play in the third conference of the Andhra Mahasabha (Satyanarayana 198).

It is not unreasonable to trace the origin and acceptance by people of street play in the old city of Hyderabad to this active application of this genre in the Telangana Peasants' Armed Struggle if we consider the impact that the Communists made even in the old city of Hyderabad especially after the 'police action'. Dr Oudesh Rani also recalls her participation in the cultural squads that performed *burrakathas* and street plays in Nalgonda district, when her brother himself was an active member of the Communist Party (Rani).

The 'liberation of Hyderabad' (from the point of view of anti-Nizam activists and population) was achieved by forceful annexation of the Hyderabad State by 'police action' of the Indian army on 17 September 1948. The meagre forces of the Nizam's army and the Razakars could not withstand the offensive of the Indian army. Now it was the turn of the Indian army to unleash massive violence against Muslim population in the districts of the Hyderabad State in the days following the accession. Though the atrocities – massacres, rape and destruction or seizure of Muslim property – were not allowed to be reported by the Indian government, a partially revived fact-finding report prepared by a committee comprising Pandit Sundarlal, Qazi Abdulghaffar and Younas Salim, all highly respected, trusted and entrusted with this responsibility by Nehru himself, throws light on the brutality of the army. The report, when submitted to the Indian government, incurred the wrath of the then Union Home Minister Vallabhbhai Patel and disowned by him as full of gross exaggerations, biased and utterly inauthentic. The same Committee members were earlier hailed by Congress itself as persons of impeccable integrity and character. The report observes that "In general the attitude of the military officers was good but the soldiers showed bigotry and hatred. Wherever the

chance occurred the soldiers displayed heir fanaticism to the fullest extent. After the Military Action, the Hindus generally behaved as if they were the rulers and the Muslims the slaves" (Sundarlal and Abdulghafar 100). It is estimated that 'at least 200,000 Muslims were in fact slaughtered in the aftermath of the Military Operations' (Khalidi 99).

As a civil servant of the Hyderabad State, who was later indicted by the Indian government on trumped up charges, remarked succinctly, "The same systematic bias of separation and contempt that was applied by the West towards colonial India was applied by free India to an intractable Hyderabad" (Hyder 174).

One of the motives behind the 'police action' was to suppress the Communists who were leading the Peasants' Struggle that was getting nation-wide attention and which threatened to spread to other parts of India across the border. The Army launched a fierce offensive on Communist cadre and hunting down its leaders. After the fall of Hyderabad, under the leadership of Maj.Gen.J.N.Chaudhury, and later under the Chief Civil Administrator M.K.Vellodi, the army started eliminating the Communist cadre. According to Ravi Narayanareddy, a major leader of the Struggle, the atrocities of the Indian army against Communist cadres and the sympathising villages exceeded those of Razakars (55). Vallabhbhai Patel came to Hyderabad and in a public meeting remarked that there was no Communist movement anywhere in the State as all its leaders were in Hyderabad itself. He also sternly warned all the citizens and especially Muslims against protecting the Communists (Narayanareddy 65). Sundarayya's remarks are telling in this context: "Eleven months of 'Congress autocracy' in Hyderabad had torn to

shreds the ‘liberation mask’ on its face, and revealed it as a ferocious dictatorship of the capitalist class, maintained at the point of bayonets” (228). The Communist Party, which could once boast of thousands of cadre, was reduced to a few hundred active members, who had to take shelter in the forests. Further, the majority of rural population of Telangana believed now that they were part of India they were liberated. Their response to the Communists started getting lukewarm. Reviewing its enormous losses, strategy and the changed circumstances, the Communist Party of India called off the Struggle in October 1951. Thus a glorious struggle halted, at least temporarily.

The Communist leaders decided to participate in the first General Elections in 1952. Those of them who had been arrested were released on parole to participate in the elections. In Telangana Communists won several seats both for the Parliament and the State Assembly. Under the banner of People’s Democratic Front they won three seats from the old city of Hyderabad also, where Muslims have been in majority. Communists were a ray of hope for the beleaguered Muslim population fresh from several shocks. The only organisation that served as their representative, Majlis, was defunct, with Kasim Razvi languishing in prison for seven years convicted after the ‘police action’. He was released in September 1957 and allowed to go to Pakistan. Before he quit India, he nominated Abdul Wahid Owaisi as his successor (Wright, Jr. 135). When Owaisi worked hard for the revival of the past glory of Majlis, the Congress party was extremely apprehensive of the attempt and tried to suppress the party. However, as the Congress came to see the Communists as a greater threat, its approach towards Majlis changed and they began to be allies. Though other organisations such as

Tameer-e-Millat, Jamaat-e-Islami, and Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat emerged to reconstruct the Muslim society and instil the lost confidence in them, it was only Majlis that offered a majority of them the sense of security they needed amidst the sense of discrimination they felt in the new Republic of India. Thus one could see a gradual shift in their patronage from the Communists to a more communal party like Majlis.

The period of communal conflict and violence in the last five decades can be divided into three phases "an uneasy communal calm (1948-57); the re-emergence of communal violence (from 1957 to the mid-1970s) and institutionalized communal polarization and unrelenting Communal Carnage (since 1978)" (Varshney quoted in Moid).

After 1956, due to the formation of Andhra Pradesh effected by the merger of ten Telugu speaking districts of the Hyderabad State with the Andhra State, and Hyderabad having been made the capital of this broader formation, a large scale migration began from the coastal and Rayalaseema districts to Hyderabad, thus changing the demography of Hyderabad City. Muslims thus reduced in percentage in the city, making them much more insecure and defensive. To counter the threat of Communists, Congress made efforts to make friends with the minorities. The emergence of Jan Sangh as a reaction to Majlis signalled the arrival of clear communal polarisation on political lines.

The composite culture of Hyderabad – known as *Ganga Jamuna Tehzeeb* – characteristic of the city since the Qutb Shahis has been seriously dented due to

these new developments. Hyderabadi Muslims formed a large part of immigrants to Middle East from 1970s after the discovery of oil in that region and the resultant wealth. Muslim families with such immigrants prospered and ventured into trade vying with the Hindus who traditionally had a monopoly in this sector. Such Muslims also brought puritanical culture from the Middle East, as a result of which the number of Madarsas and Mosques grew. The Hindu revivalists contributed to the growth of temples as a parallel and reactionary phenomenon (Moid et al). Each community was deeply entrenched in its own practices with growing suspicion towards the other community's influence. Thus we have come a long way from the Qutb Shahi ethos when these very communities learned from each other and freely influenced each other.

Tensions grew during public display of religious fervour on festive or religiously significant occasions when processions were led, especially during Bonalu, Ganesh Chaturdhi and Muharrum, which were once upon a time peacefully observed. The administration is on tenterhooks during these occasions as occasional clashes became routine. The Sangh Parivar – as the Hindu fundamentalist organisations led by the ideology propagated by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) – created organisational structures such as Ganesh Utsav Samiti to conduct the Ganesh Chaturdhi celebrations and the procession led on the tenth day for the immersion of the Ganesh idol mainly in the Hussain Sagar lake, which is referred by the Hindu revivalists as Vinayak Sagar. Hindu communal organisations were also able to enlist the membership of the so-called lower castes in the Hindu caste hierarchy such as Bhoois, Lodhas, Pardhis, Vadars, Gaulees, Lambadas and Munnoor Kapus, who became upwardly mobile

and harboured communal feelings towards Muslims. The communal tensions escalated to major riots since 1970s – in the aftermath of the Rameeza Bee case in 1978, during the Ganesh Nimajjan procession in 1984, in 1990 and in 1996 (Ibid.).

The civil society on the other hand was also active in Hyderabad. A few concerned citizens made sincere efforts to bring the two communities together through a number of activities and by attempting to raise awareness of people being carried away by the rhetoric of politicians with vested interests. Secular minded pacifists in the civil society were the only hope for peace-building, when the 'atheist' Communist Party was gradually distanced from the masses because of communal politics played by every major political party.

Hyderabad Ekta was one such effort by a few concerned citizens of Hyderabad for building harmony. This organisation was formed in response to the riots that broke out after the Rameeza Bee incident. Hyderabad Ekta tried to build awareness about the causes of riots and their consequences of riots for the common citizen, through the media of pamphlets, posters and meetings in the riot-hit areas. Henri Martin Institute also worked for inter-faith harmony by conducting programmes with leaders of all religions and starting livelihood training centres in a few areas in the old city of Hyderabad (Ibid.).

It is however COVA (Confederation of Voluntary Organisations) which made a major and multi-pronged effort to prevent riots. The following is a brief

description of COVA's activities, one of them being the application of 'street play' through one of its constituent organisations, Koshish Theatre Group.

Origin and Activities of COVA[4]

Deccan Development Society (DDS) which has been working in the districts of Telangana on sustainable agriculture, organic farming and women's empowerment decided to initiate a Communal Harmony Project in response to the riots in 1990. The project envisaged bringing people of different communities together through the medium of developmental and awareness activities. Initially as a strategy to gain a foothold and build credibility among the citizens of the old city, the project collaborated with the community based organisations (CBOs), such as mahila mandalis and youth groups that had been working in these parts without much support from outside and without a formal organisational structure. After working for about three years with these CBOs in awareness building activities, the project of DDS evolved into an organisation or rather a federation in its own right, and registered under the societies registration act as the Confederation of Voluntary Associations, which became popular as COVA.

By 2009, COVA grew into a national network of over 800 organisations working for communal harmony, peace and social justice. COVA works with women, children, youth and men from different sections and communities on the issues of peace, communal harmony, women's empowerment, child rights, youth advancement, education, health, environment, citizenship rights, natural disasters

[4] The information that follows, on COVA, has been sourced from the organisation's website (www.covanetwork.org), peace-updates through emails and its published brochures, unless otherwise referenced.

and man-made conflicts like communal riots. Apart from working with the poorer sections, COVA also actively works with the educated and professional classes to enlist their support and involvement for social transformation through college discussion groups and professional clubs. COVA believes that involving people from different communities in development programs is an effective way of achieving communal harmony and national integration. COVA ensures that all its member organisations involve people from different communities in their programs (Hussain).

The activities of COVA include programs at the grassroots, networking of organisations and institutions at the local, state and national levels, research, training, advocacy and policy interventions. COVA also works in alliance with a number of national and international organisations to promote peace in the Indian Sub-continent and across the globe.

In Hyderabad the organisation founded two programmes for women's empowerment namely Roshan Vikas and Mahila Sanatkar. The Roshan Vikas Mutually Aided Cooperative Thrift Society, which is now defunct, formed at the peak of its activity more than 1000 self-help groups, each group having a membership of 20-30 women. The savings of these women circulated as loans among the members. The low-interest loans enabled the members to start their own enterprises – vegetable and kirana shops, zardozi units, auto-rickshaws for hire – and to meet health, education and other family requirements. Roshan Vikas insisted that each self-help group comprised members from all communities in the locality. The economic transactions provided a pragmatic opportunity for

interaction among women of different communities and created an environment of mutual cooperation rather than of animosity and prejudice. The Mahila Sanatkar Mutually Aided Cooperative Society, which is still functioning, has been involved in the production and marketing of handicrafts. It is a federation of women artisans operating through eight micro-enterprise centers in the old city of Hyderabad. The members of Mahila Sanatkar are skilled in crafts like zardozi, hand embroidery, crochet, bead and jute work. Mahila Sanatkar provides raw material and advanced training to the members, and markets their products through exhibitions and orders, ensuring fair wages to the artisans.

These two enterprises not only contributed to the economic empowerment of several women but also ensured that they become ambassadors of peace and volunteers in riot-prevention activities (Hussain). Though there have been a number of occasions when these women actively prevented riots from taking place in their localities, one instance however captured the attention of the entire nation. On Friday, 15th March 2002, riots threatened to break out after the prayers at Mecca Masjid as a reaction to communal riots in Gujarat. The police machinery was all prepared to face a very tense situation. However, sensing that the intervention of the police might only worsen the tensions, the women volunteers of COVA formed a Human Chain at Charminar and stopped the riots from breaking out. They were determined to maintain peace even at the cost of their lives (Siddiqui). And they were successful to the amazement of the administration and the police. Then onwards COVA's volunteers were invited whenever the police had to face a similar situation.

Similarly, COVA planned to 'catch them young' before inter-community stereotypes get solidified. Through its Children's Department, COVA has been taking up programs that seek to broaden the horizon of children's minds, develop a scientific temperament and promote the values of communal harmony and social justice among the young minds. Para Education Program for the holistic growth of school children, Project Works, Annual Low Cost Science Exhibition, and many such programs to promote communal harmony and personality development are conducted in collaboration with 88 member schools. COVA also facilitates linkages of schools with institutions like WWF for Nature, National Institute of Nutrition, Kids for Tiger, and Traffic Police etc. for organising extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. One of the innovative programmes that COVA initiated was the children's Face to Face with administrators of the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation. Children are trained for such programmes to learn about citizens' rights and responsibilities and also to demand accountability from people's representatives and administrative officers of the local civic bodies. On many an occasion the officers were stumped by the questions of the children in these programmes, but there was all round appreciation for such training in responsible citizenship ("Children"). COVA's annual event *Sambandh* organised on 6-8 August for children from schools across the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad commemorates the anniversary of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki nuclear holocaust and encourages children to prepare and participate in competitive events like elocution, essay-writing, and one-act plays on themes related to peace, nuclear disarmament and inter-faith harmony.

The youth programmes of COVA are organised under the aegis of Youth TRAC (Youth Training Resource and Activity Center) which is itself a federation of nearly 25 youth associations in the old city of Hyderabad. These programmes aim to channelize the creative energies of the youth into constructive work. While programmes like career guidance and counselling and personality development programmes are organised for them to help them shape up their own lives, these young members also form a large chunk of the volunteer base of COVA and play a critical role in preventing untoward incidents during times of communal tension in the sensitive areas around Charminar and in their respective localities. Discussion groups are facilitated in ten major colleges in Hyderabad through which lectures by prominent peace activists or campaigns on issues of social justice are organised. Koshish Theatre Group, which is organised as part of youth programmes, comprises a team of 20 youth and children at any given point of time, performing street and stage plays that mix comic entertainment with important social messages on communal harmony and other social issues. *We will discuss Koshish in greater detail a little later in this chapter.*

In another unique initiative COVA took up organising plays and music concerts based on issues related to peace and interfaith harmony, gender issues, environment, child rights etc. Lectures on these social themes by eminent personalities and social activists are also organised for these educated and professional sections of society.

Networking has been the strength of COVA right from its inception. This strategy helped it expand its outreach to a magnitude, which would not have been possible

if it was an organisation that directly implemented all its programmes. Thus it formed networks of voluntary organisations in nine districts of the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh (Guntur, Prakasam, Nellore, Anantapur, Kadapa, Kurnool, Warangal, Mahboobnagar and Medak), and in three other States (Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Jammu and Kashmir). The selection of these districts and States was based on their past history of communal conflict at various degrees. Each network has a distinct identity comprising 25 to 30 organisations. COVA supports these members by providing training on organizational development, resource mobilisation and perspective building on communal harmony. The vision of communal harmony is promoted among these networks by ensuring inter-community partnership in their development programs. These networks have become influential pressure groups, promoting pro-people policies and working for the development of all communities. COVA also promoted and strengthened women's self-help groups and their federations, with the same inter-community caveat, in all these districts catering to about 40,000 members from different communities. While maintaining its active connection with the grassroots, directly in Hyderabad, and indirectly through its member organisations, COVA also connected with national and international level networks such as by being their active member, and often on the national boards, of Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP), Pakistan-India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFPD), Credibility Alliance, and Voluntary Action Network India (VANI). COVA also advocated pro-people policies in its capacity as a member of various government bodies, like Joint Machinery of the Planning Commission Government of India, and erstwhile Andhra Pradesh GO-NGO Coordination Committee. Of late COVA has been taking active interest in international policy

making at the SAARC level. One of the proudest milestones in COVA's journey was organising the Festival of the Subcontinent in Hyderabad on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Indian and Pakistani independence in 1997 with delegates invited from Pakistan and Bangladesh also.

Through its Peace Alliance Partners (PAP) program, COVA seeks to build perspectives on secularism and communal harmony among voluntary organisations and other educational and corporate institutions. This program aims to clarify individual and organizational outlook on communalism, and facilitate adoption of secular behaviour and practices in a multi-cultural social milieu. COVA seeks to enlist Peace Alliance Partners through this program to build a formidable secular force in India. COVA has developed some strategies to prevent the outbreak of riots. It has devised procedures and trainings to manage and contain these man-made disasters. It imparts such knowledge gained through its experience to its partners in the PAP program.

PUCAAR (People's Union for Civic Action And Rights) is an initiative of COVA's advocacy and civic rights program. PUCAAR is a grassroots program that works to organize poorer communities and enable them to secure their citizenship rights. Through the *basti* committees, PUCAAR focuses on various civic issues and advocates their redress. Under the aegis of PUCAAR various awareness activities were organised on the Right to Information Act. Several citizen activists were moulded by the support offered by PUCAAR, which guided them by imparting knowledge on the complex administrative machinery of the

local bodies and strategies to get the issues in the localities addressed by the government officials and people's representatives.

Koshish Theatre Group

Koshish Theatre Group (KTG), a member of Youth TRAC, was formed in 2000 as an upshot of the month-long Summer Camps that COVA has been organizing since its inception. If we consider its proportion in terms of budget and involvement of the efforts of paid staff, Koshish is one of the minor programmes of COVA. But for COVA's mission of propagating the message of communal harmony and peace, it is certainly a very important programme. Besides, COVA's aim to engage youth and children productively was more than served by the 'theatre for a cause' (Hussain). Before Koshish there had been no local tradition of street theatre in the old city. But one major inspiration for the conception of Koshish Theatre Group was Jana Natya Manch and its founder Safdar Hashmi, admits Dr. Mazher Hussain, Executive Director of COVA in a personal interview. The funding agencies were also positive about this activity as it was a good medium for perspective building on communal harmony.

During the Ganesh Festival and in the tense situation after communal riots in the old city, Koshish Theatre Group performs street plays spreading the message of peace. Koshish endeavors to sensitize people on various social issues with special focus on communal harmony. Collaborating with PUCAAR, it also spreads the message on citizenship rights such as RTI and the Right to Basic Services, which is conceptualised by COVA itself. Apart from performing on its own in the bastis

of the old city of Hyderabad, Koshish Theatre Group performs on invitation from colleges, schools, community organisations, government and non-governmental organisations and corporate houses for sensitizing students, communities, staff of government and non-governmental organisations on social issues. The Koshish team collaborates with other NGOs and Theatre Production houses in staging socially-conscious street and stage plays. Koshish charges a nominal fee, when it is invited, for meeting travel, props and other expenses of the team. Sometimes they are commissioned by governmental and non-governmental organizations for spreading awareness on a particular issue, be it on tuberculosis or HIV/AIDS. They have been recently engaged by L&T Hyderabad Metro for creating awareness on the benefits of metro rail (Gopikrishna).

Presently, the core group of Koshish comprises about 25 members, eight of them being girls. This number expectably keeps changing, as some children and youth involved in Koshish leave for higher education, their families relocate, or the girls get married. In fact, this volatile membership is one of the nagging challenges that Koshish faces while attempting to achieve even a moderate level of self-sustenance. In line with COVA's policy, the membership has representation of different communities, almost all of them hailing from economically deprived sections of the old city of Hyderabad. Many of them were school-dropouts when they joined Koshish, but resumed studies after joining Koshish Theatre Group, taking benefit from the career guidance programmes of Youth TRAC. The team members support their families or at least meet their personal expenses in a small way by the remuneration they receive from the performances. Most of the present group are going to school or college and spend their evenings and weekends

rehearsing with Koshish. COVA has provided the much needed space for the youth of the old city for channeling their youthful energy into something constructive. The work gives them tremendous amount of self-esteem and a positive self image (Pathan). Many of them transformed from being disillusioned youth, vulnerable for manipulation by anti-social elements, to confident managers of their lives. From shy and diffident teenagers, many of them became glib talkers and entertain aspirations of entering television or movie industry as actors or directors. The achievement of Koshish was involving girls from the old city in theatre activities. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary KTG felicitated its girl members, who had faced stiff resistance from their families but later negotiated with and convinced their parents, came out and performed the plays on the street.

Artistes of Koshish Theatre Group have at times faced the wrath of communal groups while performing on streets for peace and harmony. Their persistent efforts yielded results when the same people who had been against them joined the Group in spreading the message of brotherhood.

In the last 14 years of its journey, Koshish has given over 1000 performances on the streets and has staged over 250 performances in prestigious auditoriums of the country. The performances were widely acclaimed for their success in sensitizing people on different social issues. The Group has a number of plays on communal harmony, national integration, education, women's rights, child labour, HIV/AIDS and other social issues in its repertoire. With considerable experience in street and stage theatre and formal training in theatre techniques, the Koshish team now offers training programs to students in college and schools in acting and

production of short plays. Koshish Theatre Group offers training sessions in acting to school children. It also participates in local and national level competitions. Koshish has won many State and National awards and received extensive coverage in print and electronic media including the BBC. (See Appendix III)

Trainers

Koshish Theatre Group has the good fortune of having well-qualified and passionate theatre professionals as trainers right from the beginning. Each of them contributed to the group their unique perspective, skills and insights which kept boosting the morale of the group and helped it become professional rather than remain an amateur team. However, since, as mentioned earlier, there is considerable turnout in the membership, not every team was able to leverage the cumulative strength of the history of the group.

Prof. Bhaskar Shewalkar was the first to initiate the youth volunteers of COVA into street theatre by producing Asghar Wajahat's *Sabse Sasta Gosht* with them. An acclaimed theatre professional, actor, director and teacher, Prof. Shewalkar recalls that he first staged a 'street play' at Shalibanda in the old city, where he grew up, when he was a boy (Shewalkar). The play, a creation borne out of his observation of the life of working class in the area, was about the ill-effects of alcoholism. Much before theatre became his full-time profession, he had been passionate about theatre while doing odd jobs. The founding of 'Rangadhara' in 1971 was a turning point in his life. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* was one

of Rangadhara's early productions, which made bigwigs in national theatre sit up and notice. "Rangadhara has enriched the theatre landscape of not only Hyderabad but also Maharashtra, and beyond" (Reddy*)*. Shewalkar recalls that "in the Ganesh Navaratri season, all Maharashtrian localities in the city used to be, even more than now, agog with music, dance and theatre activities" (Ibid). Rangadhara collaborated with Grips Theatre, the German children's theatre which was brought to Hyderabad by Max Mueller Bhavan, and produced Tankred Dorst's play, *The Great Tirade at the City Wall*, in Hindi, which Shewalkar directed in November, 1980. He joined the faculty of Theatre Arts at University of Hyderabad in 1983 and retired as Professor and Head of the Department in 2002. However, he continues to team up with theatre professionals even now. He trained a number of successful actors and theatre actors who went into theatre, television and films in Hyderabad and Mumbai.

Dr Rammohan Holagundi, who succeeded Prof. Shewalkar as the trainer for the Koshish team added his professionalism to the administration of the team. He was the first to bring them out of the old city for a wider exposure through preparing them for competitions in Hyderabad and outside the city. A student of Prof. Bhaskar Shewalkar, Rammohan was a gold-medalist in his post-graduation in theatre arts from the University of Hyderabad and acquired a Ph.D degree from the same university. The theatre group Nishumbita, of which Rammohan was a co-founder, is one of the few professional theatre groups vibrant in Hyderabad acclaimed both for its bold experimentation (with the production of *The Chairs, Waiting for Godot, Macbeth* among others), and social commitment (evident in their plays for the prisoners of the Central Prison of Charlapally in Hyderabad, and

street plays on a number of issues including on gender issues). He has recently been selected to participate in the International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP) on Promoting Social Change Through the Arts sponsored by the U.S. Department of State (Borah).

Dr Gopikrishna has been coordinating Koshish Theatre Group as its trainer and director of its plays for the past seven years. With a Ph.D. in children's theatre from Potti Sriramulu Telugu University, Gopikrishna came to Koshish with wide exposure and experience in acting and directing. Under his training and leadership, Koshish was able to bag several awards at the national level competitions. Closely working with the visionary director of COVA, Dr Mazher Hussain, Gopikrishna has been able to find the dramatic idiom compatible with the mission of COVA.

The Plays of Koshish

Out of about 25 plays in the Koshish repertoire, three, namely, *Sabse Sasta Gosht*, *Mera Bharat Mahan,* and *Maanush,* were originally written by Dr. Asghar Wajahat and adapted by Koshish at various degrees. A Telugu short story ("Gayatri D/o Basheer Ahmed" written by Khaja Pasha, 2009) was dramatised and translated into Urdu by the Koshish team as *Ram, Son of Raheem* (Gopikrishna). While *TB se Jung* was commissioned by Mahavir Hospitals, the play *Nutrition* was conceptualised in collaboration with National Institute of Nutrition. All the rest were conceptualised collectively by Team Koshish and sometimes scripted by one or the other individual members in the team. (*Ram, Son of Raheem; Praja Nahi Nagarik Hai Hum, Naya Savera, Jagore, Aurat ek guna* and *Jung Chahiye*

Ya Aman are not included in the list provided in Appendix I as the source-blog has not been updated.)

Even a cursory look at the thematic concerns addressed by these plays reveals the priorities of Koshish. Seven out of the 16 plays deal with communal harmony. Apart from entertaining comedies, all the earlier plays of Koshish invariably dealt with this ideal, which was the core of its parent organisation's vision. For its financial sustenance, Koshish accepted assignments from other NGOs and some plays like *TB se Jung* and *Nutrition* reflect this phase. COVA's growing attention to advocacy on civic issues is evident in plays like *Kyonki Sach Kadua Hota Hai* and *Praja Nahi Nagarik Hai Hum*. The latest play, *Jung Chahiye Ya Aman*, reflects again the organisation's abiding concern for peace at the level of the Indian Subcontinent as well, since the Indo-Pak relations have the unique character of influencing the relations of Hindus and Muslims in India thanks to communal politicians.

Another trend in Koshish journey appears to be inclining towards stage plays. A stage play is secure. The audience are defined. The venue creates the environment for the right measure of decorum. Infrastructure such as the sound system, lighting and the stage machinery aid the actors on the stage. For a street play, on the contrary, any passerby can be the audience. The reaction of the audience to the play can be unpredictable. Actors cannot afford to use any infrastructure but must use their own personal resources to attract the attention of the audience.

Sabse Sasta Gosht is one of the earliest productions of Koshish and perhaps the most performed of all its plays after the mime on National Integration. Written by Dr Asghar Wajahat and made into a street play by Nishanth Natya Manch, New Delhi, the play has become a prototype of street plays on communal harmony. The stereotypical characters of Hindu and Muslim politicians are not perceived by the audience as stereotypical but true-to- life characters, since, like the communal politicians in real life they are more concerned about using religious identity for their political mileage than about the welfare of their respective communities. At the outset of the play we see Hindu and Muslim leaders frustrated about how they could go back to the people of their constituencies without ever inquiring about their well being in the last term. In the thinking-aloud mode of the street play, they share with the audience their plans to fan communal feelings and to provoke their respective community against the other. In the meantime the Muslim Mullah and the Hindu Priest rush to the politicians with their problems – the Muslim youth do not visit the mosque any more, the Hindu youth are no longer interested in the rituals. The existence of the priestly profession is at stake. As a solution to the problems of all four of them, the politicians then ask their respective priests to drop pork in mosque and beef in the temple. The priests do it with the help of seasoned gundas. The next day there is an uproar in both the mosque and the temple about the sacrilege and tempers run high in both the camps. In the meantime, an ordinary citizen intervenes and demonstrates by analysing the texture of the pieces of meat that it is neither pork nor beef, but the flesh of a human being. The politicians and the priests are disappointed that their game plan is defeated. The revelation that it is the human flesh does not cause a fresh

sensation. Crowds just disperse after this discovery as if it is normal. From this understatement arises the title 'the cheapest flesh'.

This strategy of getting offensive meat thrown into one's own place of worship to accuse the other community for the offence still continues wherever there are communal politics at play. *Sabse Sasta Gosht* exposes this tactic, of which there are innumerable parallels in real life, by the politicians, whose sole aim is to divert the attention of the electorate from demanding accountability from their community leaders. The play highlights a normalised tendency of the communal mind which takes offence at the sight of pork or beef but is unperturbed by the shedding of human blood in the wake of communal clashes. This abnormality is the epidemic that the play wishes to expose. Though its straightforward satire is accessible to the audience, the play does not preach directly. It just removes the masks that the politicians and religious leaders wear and lets them act out their secret selves. This self-explanatory exposure itself is an eloquent comment – there is no narrator for commenting. The action is partly stylised in the singing together and making of slogan-like statements revealing the intentions of the communal politicians. It is the performance of this play that sometimes provoked the wrath of the watching crowds. Sometimes there was stone pelting at the performers by anonymous individuals in the crowd and this kind of behaviour called for an appeal from the actors in the middle of the play.

Another play *Praja nahi nagarik hai hum* ('We are citizens not just people') reminds the audience about their citizenship rights. A working class family approaches the corporator for laying new water pipeline replacing an ancient one

('laid in the Nizam's time'), which gets broken every now and then, causing drainage water to mix with drinking water. The corporator has other priorities, of building a community hall and a road. Obviously he is greedily eying the kickbacks in these two projects. But the family insists that according to law (the Constitution - 74th Amendment Act) the corporator has to take the approval of the Area Sabha of his/her ward for the proposed public works. The corporator initially resists, but has to give in to public pressure. The Area Sabha is convened and laying of the water pipeline is voted by majority as the priority issue. COVA launched a two-month long Campaign to activate Area Sabhas and Ward Committees of Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) on 2 February 2012 in Hyderabad. Hundreds of people, especially youth participated with enthusiasm, signed the petition and the banner as part of the Signature Campaign. The campaign continued in different localities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad for two months with the objective of making people aware and also to put pressure on GHMC to conduct the meetings of Area Sabhas and Ward Committees regularly and as per stipulation. *Praja nahi nagarik hai hum* was created by Koshish as part of this campaign.

The corporator is made a comic figure, in tune with the 'street theatre' tradition of 'carnival' in which hierarchies are made topsy turvy. His farcical actions, his *gangnam* dance, feigned dignity, and exaggerated gestures amplify the comicality. The young man of the family rattles out the provisions of the 74th Amendment Act, stressing the point that they are aware that they are not merely 'subjects' but citizens. The binary subject/citizen is highlighted throughout the play as an undercurrent of the dialogues and provides the title to the play. While the term

'subjects' or just 'people (*praja*)' is defined in the play as the subjugated masses with 'submerged consciousness' (to borrow Paulo Frier's phrase), the term 'citizen' removes this passivity and gains consciousness of rights that the native of a country is entitled to. The most vocal of the characters is the old lady (simply named *khala* meaning aunt, an address used for an elderly lady in the community), who speaks her rights not from an awareness of what she is entitled to in the Constitution but from some native intelligence, which presumes that an elected representative is not supposed to wallow in luxuries (like the mineral water) while the electors themselves are deprived of even the ordinary water. Her desperate fight and harsh attitude of calling a spade a spade, while providing comic relief also, reminds many in the audience that, unlike her, they are used to mincing words in their daily lives. Thus her character is an utter contrast to her fellow 'citizens' who may even be aware of their entitlements but are afraid to demand for them from the powers that be. There is an attempt to realistically mirror the different characters in the bastis, with a focus on deriving amusement for the audience from the dialect. Five Muslim characters and a Hindu character (*Yadanna*) make up the dramatis personae. There is no reference to communal disharmony anywhere, suggesting that communal feelings are never on the top of the agenda of the working class. Their basic amenities definitely are.

This 'street play' resembles less a quintessential street play than a well-made play. Except for the comical portrayal of the corporator, which is more of a farce but can be found in street plays too, and humor in dialogue, there is no stylization, songs, dance, music, narrator and minimal use of properties which make a street play what it is. Another important feature in this play is the erection of the 'fourth

wall' as in a proscenium play. Evidently the same format is being used even when it is performed in the street corners, but without the properties. The inclination towards the proscenium play or creating a format which flexibly converts a street play into a stage play may indicate the growing distance from the masses who are the target audiences. The play fetched Koshish the Best Play, Best Actor and the Best Ensemble awards at a Theatre Competition organised by S.K.I.T.S Hyderabad, in which 32 groups, including troupes from corporates and multinationals participated. Does it become a show piece of political correctness meant for the consumption of elite urban audience? This is a question for the introspection by the team.

The mime show in the Koshish repertoire called by many names such as *National Integration*, *Saare Jahan Se Achcha* and *Mano to dev ya to pathar* is certainly the most performed of all Koshish productions. It never fails to evoke a pleasant surprise and spontaneous applause from the audience at its climax. Introduced to Koshish when Dr Rammohan was the trainer, even today this is the only show that Koshish can think of performing in the Ganesh Mandaps without provoking any controversy. In this mime show, three men at various points of time prepare sculptures from a rock as symbols of their respective faiths. The changing shape of the rock after each successive sculpting effort eventually causes a clash. A pacifist enters and gradually brings about harmony among the three. The three are now united to make a symbol of peace from the same rock. To reveal that the symbol of peace finally prepared is the sculpture of Mahatma Gandhi is actually to spoil the suspense! This mime show has been circulating around in school, colleges for so many years with improvisations and stylizations that we do not know who

created it in the first place. It is now part of modern folklore! Thus its appeal to audience is in its being a ritual-tribute to inter-faith harmony by invoking Gandhi or the idea of secular India.

Impact of Koshish

Koshish plays certainly created some goodwill for COVA among both Hindu and Muslim communities. Their plays in Ganesh mandaps kept audience engaged. Some police officials sincerely appreciated the efforts of Koshish for communal harmony. Mr. Mohd. Turab, Executive Secretary of COVA shared that a police officer was so thrilled at their performance at a Ganesh mandap that he claimed he had never seen any such effort in the entire Andhra Pradesh and hoped for more such efforts across the country (Turab).

Koshish plays were also able to enthuse and inspire students in colleges and schools and the message of communal harmony is effectively etched in the memory of the audience. Mr. P. Ajay Kumar, who once coordinated the Children's Programme and later Youth TRAC shared in his personal interview that because of the discussion that Koshish artistes usually have with student audience after each performance, the knowledge levels and articulation also appear to have improved among the students. Some teachers of COVA's member schools testify to this achievement (Kumar). Ajay Kumar also observed that the feedback from the audience after the street play performance was generally positive, except on a few occasions when stones were pelted at the performers.

Performances were necessary at the colonies where there was a mixed community, but they are also a challenge because the residents of such localities are highly sensitive to an inadvertent remark.

However, it is not possible to measure the impact of Koshish plays on the audience (Hussain). Mr. Mohd. Afzal, who was a Coordinator of Youth TRAC, opines that 'street play' is too weak a form to counter the 'cyclone of communal politics' (Afzal). He also feels that Koshish street plays were organised only in response to an urgent need in the slums of the old city. COVA used to screen some documentary films in the *basti*s in the initial days of its functioning. Due to the impact of television there were fewer and fewer audience for these films. Compared to these documentaries, the live shows of Koshish's street plays were much more attractive. They served to strengthen the work of other wings of COVA – whether it was a question of thrift (Roshan Vikas) or civic issues (PUCAAR), Koshish became a cultural squad to take their messages across to the communities and prepared the ground for concrete work.

Apart from the difficult question of the impact of Koshish on the communities, with a certain historical memory, we can also consider its impact on its team members, who were also part of these communities. In a focussed group discussion this researcher held with the first batch of Koshish members, M.A. Hasnain, Qayam Hashmi, Shaik Akram, Mohd. Iqbal, S.M.Arif and Mirza Hameed Baig, these former members testified to the transformation they underwent due to Koshish. All of them agreed that Koshish enhanced their self-confidence, social skills, team spirit and voluntary spirit. It also taught them the

importance of peace and communal harmony in the development of society and made them introspect and reform their own communal feelings. Their interaction with Hindu boys grew – there were Sanjeev, Kishore, Pravesh in the first batch – and misunderstandings about the 'other culture' were reduced. Dr Rammohan trained them in script writing and music. Osman Pathan, their batch mate, though not with Koshish any more, is still writing plays for the street and stage – his play 'Rickshaw wale ka sapna' has been staged at La Makan, Hyderabad, recently. Aamer Hashmi, another of their batchmates, also found his flair for writing while at Koshish. Mirza Hameed Baig was the captain of that team, when Koshish was learning its first lessons in theatre. He admitted to the tremendous influence of Koshish on his personality. He surprised himself with the leadership qualities that he found in himself. The team recalled how Koshish became known not only among NGOs but also in the administrative circles. They performed street plays for Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad, National Institute of Nutrition, Mahavir Hospitals, Bhoruka Charitable Trust, Mahita, Nandi Foundation, Krushi Clinics on issues such as communal harmony, early child marriages, dowry, child labour, civic issues, nutrition, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS.

Osman Pathan in his personal interview revealed that his passion for theatre was unknown to himself until he came into contact with Koshish. He used to work in a paan shop after discontinuing his studies after 7^{th} standard. He used to be a recluse before Koshish. Through one of his customers he came to know about the 'space' called Koshish and approached Mirza who was in its charge then. His tour with Koshish members to a Theatre Festival in Kerala changed his life. In spite of resistance from his family he continued to associate with Koshish, initially helping

them in the backstage work. When he was able to prove himself as a talented script writer his self-confidence increased. He took the theatre training seriously, improved his body language, walking style and speech. He acquired directorial and make-up skills. He became more and more active as a writer, actor, and director. He also started teaching theatre to youth and children at COVA's summer camps. He started to get assignments for Koshish from other organizations and government agencies on his own initiative. Thus he started earning a little from his hobby. He also worked as the President of Koshish. He went on to work as Assistant Director with the Quader Ali Baig Foundation for some of its plays.

Shaik Akram similarly recounts his transforming encounter with Koshish. Initially he joined the Play for Peace programme at COVA which used to train youngsters in conducting non-competitive games for children in conflict areas. It was then not difficult for him to shift to Koshish. He recalls the first role he played in 2006 in the mime on National Integration. He was part of the team which performed this show in Ganesh Mandaps. He was proud of revealing that he was felicitated for his performance by the community at Kandikal Gate in the old city of Hyderabad. As part of the Koshish team he was happy at the opportunity of visiting different parts of the country and participating in the Theatre Festivals there. He worked as the General Secretary of Koshish. Like Osman Pathan, he admits to being a very shy person before joining Koshish. Koshish gave him the courage to talk to government officials on equal footing. He also acknowledges that guest lectures and joint celebration of festivals that COVA organized also had a deep impact on him and helped him overcome his biases.

Another important contribution of Koshish to the culture of the old city of Hyderabad was the bringing out of girls from their homes for engaging them in cultural activity. The first batch of Koshish had seven girls – Ghousia, Muskan, Ayesha, Faiza, Farheen, Shahana, and Zeenath. Muskan worked as the President of the Koshish Theatre Group after it was registered in 2003 (Mirza et al). Each batch had at least three or four girls. For those who know the culture of the old city it is easy to appreciate the fact that it is almost revolutionary for a family in these parts to allow its girl child to act and that too in street plays. It is evident that COVA was able to establish enough credibility to convince the parents of the safety of their daughters in its work.

It is perhaps no exaggeration to conclude that the street play of Koshish Theatre Group is the only mass medium of communication that COVA has been using for building awareness about the dynamics of communal conflicts, to demystify mutual prejudices, to bring back the focus of citizens on to issues that matter to their livelihood and dignity of life, and to bring about harmony between the various communities. Even if this peace building effort may be small compared with the gigantic challenge being posed by communal politics, the effort must continue but in the right direction. Is it possible for Koshish to combat the challenge more effectively by sharpening their tool, the street play? Are the resources of a ‘street play’ fully exploited by Koshish and COVA for creating more impact? What do the apparent shift of late in the venues and forms of play of Koshish signify? Is there any model that they can learn from in the history of street theatre practice in India or abroad? What kind of attitudinal changes may be needed for them to open up for introspection and to increase their proximity with

the people that they target? We will address these questions, among other issues with regard to the practice of street theatre, in the following chapter.

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Chapter Five

Layered Hegemonies

In the previous chapters, we have examined, rather quite ambitiously (and with limited depth permitted by the scope of this study), the synchronic and diachronic practice of street theatre, that is, across continents and across different historical moments (spanning the decades of the twentieth century), the diversity in the practice and the historical and political milieu. In the first chapter, an attempt was made to provide a bird's eye view of the study of street theatre – its definitions, its origins, its form, its purposes and its practices, apart from the personal motivations of this researcher to take up this study and the study's objectives. It was mentioned that this researcher was associated with a non-governmental organisation, which is working on issues related to the co-existence of two communities, which have been historically in a conflicting relationship for whatever reasons, and which aims to achieve harmony between these communities by employing various strategies, one of them being awareness-building through street theatre. This unusual strategy by an NGO (unusual in the combination of the agency and the purpose) triggered the curiosity in the researcher for examining the genre in depth. The study then on took him across continents (of course on an intellectual plane!) and introduced to him the vast treasures scattered across time and space. The chapter traces the pre-modern forms of street play as revealed by previous research to as far back as Bharata, and the forms like *Therukuttu* and *Bayalata* dating back to twelfth century A.D. It also discusses the scholarly consensus on the pioneering role that IPTA played in reviving the modern street theatre form. The characteristics of the ancient form and its modern variation have been mentioned.

The review also introduced the major practitioners of the modern street theatre in India as identified by previous scholars, and the international influences, and set out its methodology of analysing the street theatre practice from the conceptual framework provided by the Marxist tradition confined to the limits of base, superstructure and hegemony. (The current chapter will comment on the data accumulated in the previous chapters for such analysis.)

The second chapter has surveyed, by looking at representative models and so by no means comprehensively, how street theatre has been practiced in countries other than India, such as Brazil, Argentina, Kenya, South Africa, Great Britain, USA, Canada, Thailand, Philippines, Pakistan and Bangladesh suggesting why it had/has to be *street* theatre rather than conventional proscenium theatre, what its concerns and purposes have been in different locations, and how effective such practice has been in terms of sustenance and the reaction/response it has been receiving from various agencies such as the state, civil society and other practitioners of theatre. The two major influences of the October Revolution and the 1968 Student Uprising in France were also described. While Boal and Brecht emerge as the enduring influences, it also becomes clear from this brief survey that indigenous art forms underwent a revival in a reconstructed form as a reaction to colonial oppression for 'decolonising the mind' of the colonised, to borrow Ngugi Thiong'o's attractive phrase. A model of a very recent street play being performed in the USA, *Bradass87: A Play about Chelsea Manning* has been cited and briefly analysed. The variety of models of street theatre used across the countries at various points of the twentieth century history, as described in this chapter, may

most likely baffle a scholar set out to derive the essential characteristics of this genre.

The Indian scenario with regard to street theatre has been described in the third chapter. After flagging off the issues debated in the context of Indian street theatre – proscenium versus street theatre, and the dangers inherent in uncritical use of folk forms in the context of political theatre, a sweeping survey has been undertaken in the chapter that covered the formation and influence of IPTA, the street theatre practices of Janam, Badal Sircar's Third Theatre, Utpal Dutt's Little Theatre, Jana Sanskriti Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed, Samudaya of Karnatka, Chennai Kalai Kuzhu of Tamilnadu, Women's Theatre, the other active practitioners elsewhere in India, notably Budhan Theatre in Gujarat, the various groups either affiliated to the Left parties or that work with Left sympathies, such as Andhra Praja Natya Mandali, Jana Natya Mandali, Arunodaya, Jana Sahiti, and individual experimenters in the academic field. The uses that street theatre has been put to for other than political propaganda and experimentation have also been described. Like Brecht and Boal in the international arena, Hashmi and Badal Sircar emerge as the most influential models in the Indian context. Especially Hashmi's martyrdom caused a spurt of new street theatre groups in India and provoked many other such groups that had been dormant for a long time into resuming street theatre practice with renewed energy and anger.

In what is probably the crux of the concern of this study, which is also unique to this study, the fourth chapter has traced the history of the region now roughly known as the Telangana State, but earlier at different points of time, with different

boundaries, as the Deccan, Golconda, and the Hyderabad State, from the dynasties of the Qutb Shahs and the Asaf Jahs down to the merger of the Hyderabad State into the Union of India. The history of the region has been traced at such length in order to establish the roots of the conflict between the Hindu and the Muslim communities that necessitated interventions for harmony, such as the one being made by the Confederation of Voluntary Associations (COVA) through its street theatre wing called Koshish Theatre Group. An important historical occurrence in the region that has a bearing, not directly on the content of street theatre as is practised today by Koshish, but on the form and its general concern for social change, is the Telangana Peasants' Armed Struggle, of which a picture was drawn in considerable detail in this chapter. It is in the context of this struggle that folk forms were adapted actively by the cultural squads of the IPTA unit, known as Praja Natya Mandali, in the erstwhile Andhra State and the present Andhra Pradesh State, crossing over into the then Nizam's Dominions and training and guiding the squads there in agitation and propaganda. The interventions of COVA and the activities of Koshish Theatre Group have been described at length with an analysis of a few of its plays. A more detailed comment on the street theatre practice of the Koshish Theatre Group will be taken up in the last section of this chapter.

It is argued in this study that street theatre has been used in the historical moments or processes as listed in the table below as challenging the hegemony of the dominant culture and represented, in general, the emergent culture of an envisioned future of a classless society or a more egalitarian and democratic society. The following table captures a very few of the key historical events and

processes during which street theatre was actively used, gleaned from the surveys in the previous chapters. The specific purpose for which this art form was used is mentioned against each historical event.

Historical Moment/Process	Purpose of Street Theatre Practice
October Revolution, USSR, 1917	Subverting the still dominant feudal values in the USSR and establishing new values based on the future vision of Communism
Student Uprising, France, 1968	Opposing the oppressive capitalist economic measures of De Gaulle's government and the domination of the US culture; anti-Vietnam War
The Military Dictatorship, Brazil, 1964-1985	Opposing the authoritarian dictatorship during 1964-1985 and later for greater participation of citizens in policy making
'Disappearance' of 30,000 citizens, Argentina, 1976-1983	Opposing state terrorism and violence against political dissidents, socialists
Dictatorial regime, Kenya, 1977	Against violation of national dignity and cultural colonisation
Anti-Vietnam War, Europe, USA, 1955-1975	Across Europe, USA and several other countries, against US imperialism and anti-Communist campaigns
Reclaim the Streets, London, 1991	Opposing the corporate forces and capitalism and for community ownership of public spaces

Displacement of Hmong community, Laos/Thailand, 1975 (?)	Restoring self-respect, and empowerment of the community
Struggle for national democracy, Philippines, 1986	Opposing repressive and corrupt regimes
Martial Law, Pakistan, 1979-1999	Against dictatorship, patriarchal state policies, religious fundamentalism, oppression of women
Student Protest at Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China, 1989	Against totalitarian state
HIV/AIDS Epidemic, USA, 1987	Against the US government's pharma policy, for gay and lesbian rights and discrimination against AIDS victims
Telangana Peasants' Armed Struggle, 1946-1951	Revolting against feudal oppression and semi-feudal, semi-colonial independent Indian government
Communist Movement, 1940s onwards	Against feudal, capitalist, colonial, fascist, patriarchal, casteist oppressions
Women's Liberation Movements, India, 1970s, 1980s	Against societal and domestic violence against women, patriarchal values and for women's empowerment

In the light of the discussions in the previous chapters, we shall look at street theatre in this chapter on two planes in three sections – on a more theoretical

plane, after discussing the concepts being used for analysis (the Marxist concepts of hegemony, residual and emergent cultures, as described by Raymond Williams), it shall be examined how street theatre, and specifically the organisation that heralded this genre in its modern form IPTA, has suffered marginalisation in a phenomenon of 'layered hegemony' (my term); on a pragmatic plane, an attempt shall be made to draw lessons from various models described in the previous chapters for application in a specific historical situation in which Koshish Theatre is operating.

I

In his influential essay "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory", Raymond Williams addresses the difficulties that these two concepts pose in literary analysis from a Marxist perspective unlike the related Marxist axiom that social being determines consciousness, in which social being corresponds to the base and consciousness to the superstructure. He contends that Marxist critics who used these terms understood the terms and the relationship between base and superstructure in a sense that connotes predictability. In the proposition that base determines the superstructure, the term 'determine' has come to mean in the European languages "on the one hand, from its theological inheritance, the notion of an external cause which totally predicts or prefigures, indeed totally controls a subsequent activity. But there is also, from the experience of social practice, a notion of determination as setting limits, exerting pressures" (Williams 4). It is the second sense that Williams finds true to the spirit of Marx, as Marx consistently

countered any notion of determination of circumstances by any external force other than human agency.

According to Marx, modes and relations of economic production in a society constitute the base, and all cultural and ideological phenomena in the society form the superstructure. Marx's contention was that the base is what dictates what would be the dominant values or culture in the superstructure. In other words, the cultural life of a society at a given point of history, its values system, legal systems and constitution *reflect* the production relations dominant at that point in that society. Williams in his analysis finds that the relation between the base and superstructure is not as direct and simple as it is made to appear by the Marxist critics. It is not always easy to find direct correlation between the cultural forms and the economic system. "The simplest notion of a superstructure, which is still by no means entirely abandoned, had been the reflection, the imitation or the reproduction of the reality of the base in the superstructure in a more or less direct way.... But since in many real cultural activities this relationship cannot be found, or cannot be found without effort or even violence to the material or practice being studied, the notion was introduced of delays in time, the famous lags; of various technical complications; and of indirectness, in which certain kinds of activity in the cultural sphere – philosophy, for example – were situated at a greater distance from the primary economic activities" (Ibid. 4-5). A further reconsideration of the complexity of the relationship of superstructure to the base "gave rise to the modern notion of 'mediation', in which something more than simple reflection or reproduction – indeed something radically different from either reflection or reproduction – actively occurs" (Ibid. 5). Much later the complexity is further

explained in terms of “the notion of ‘homologous structures’, where there may be no direct or easily apparent similarity, and certainly nothing like reflection or reproduction, between the superstructural process and the reality of the base, but in which there is an essential homology or correspondence of structures, which can be discovered by analysis” (Ibid.5).

Similarly, Williams also reviews the limited sense in which the term ‘base’ is used in Marxist cultural analysis. He finds that the term has been used “in essentially uniform and usually static ways” (Ibid.5). By again invoking the spirit of Marx, he explains ‘Marx’s emphasis on productive activities, in particular structural relations, constituting the foundation of all other activities’ (Ibid.5). A particular stage of the development of production is never in practice either uniform or static. “It is indeed one of the central propositions of Marx’s sense of history that there are deep contradictions in the relationships of production and in the consequent social relationships. There is therefore the continual possibility of the dynamic variation of these forces. Moreover, when these forces are considered, as Marx always considers them, as the specific activities and relationships of real men, they mean something very much more active, more complicated and more contradictory than the developed metaphorical notion of ‘the base’ could possibly allow us to realize” (Ibid.5).

In summary, what is required to make the Marxist proposition of base determining the superstructure more reasonable is to re-view all the three terms rather than amending one and ignoring the other: “We have to revalue ‘determination’ towards the setting of limits and the exertion of pressure, and away from a

predicted, prefigured and controlled content. We have to revalue 'superstructure' towards a related range of cultural practices, and away from a reflected, reproduced or specifically dependent content. And, crucially, we have to revalue 'the base' away from the notion of a fixed economic or technological abstraction, and towards the specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships, containing fundamental contradictions and variations and therefore always in a state of dynamic process (Ibid. 6).

In a search for alternative models for base and superstructure which convey the same axiom of social being determining consciousness, Williams finds the concept of 'totality' of social practices, predominantly advocated by Lukacs, useful but only to a limited extent. This theory of totality of social practices, in Lukacs, which "interact, relate and combine in very complicated ways" is limited for its lack of recognition of the notion of intention behind such interactions, relations and combinations (Ibid.7). However William remarks that if it is combined with another Marxist concept of *hegemony* – the emphasis of which is a contribution of Antonio Gramsci – which refers to domination of a kind "which is lived at such a depth, which saturates the society to such an extent, and which, as Gramsci put it, even constitutes the limit of common sense for most people under its sway, that it corresponds to the reality of social experience", we get a more comprehensive tool for cultural analysis (Ibid.8). It is through the process of hegemony, achieved by various methods (such as, system etc.), rather than apparent coercion that the ruling class gets the consent of the ruled for their values, which make the dominant values, that is, the values that fulfil the interests of the ruling class, look 'natural' and 'common sense'. Again, however, it has become a general practice,

according to Williams, to use hegemony in simplistic terms, as has been the case with base and superstructure.

To counteract the simplistic and mechanical interpretation of these terms, Williams introduces another model that is made up of the concepts of *residual culture* and *emergent culture* (8). Residual culture signifies the value system present in a society and no longer dominant but that belongs to a past moment in history and carried into the present by a few adherents. Emergent culture refers to the value system, which is not dominant either, but anticipates a system of a future point in history. There are again alternative and oppositional cultures within both residual and emergent cultures (Ibid. 10). Williams observes that both residual culture and emergent culture can be found alongside the dominant culture of a society at any given point of time and they are tolerated by the ruling ideology to the extent that they do not actively threaten the existence of dominant values. The dominant culture also 'incorporates' certain features of these other cultures that do not challenge its own domain. While it is easy to find the sources of residual cultural practices from a historical analysis, "our hardest task theoretically, is to find a non-metaphysical and a non-subjectivist explanation of emergent cultural practice (Ibid 12). One source from the Marxist theoretical point of view is the "coming to consciousness of a new class" (Ibid.12.) Gramsci's whole object was "to see and to create by organization the hegemony of a proletarian kind which is capable of challenging the bourgeois hegemony" (Ibid.12). But we need to recognise other sources of such emergent culture. Any attempt at such an organisation for an emergent culture may be either overlooked when it is perceived as ineffective, or curbed when its danger is perceived. Williams

observes: “In capitalist practice, if the thing is not making a profit, or if it is not being widely circulated, then it can for some time be overlooked, at least while it remains alternative. When it becomes oppositional in an explicit way, it does, of course, get approached or attacked” (Ibid. 12). Referring to such efforts, William remarks:

> Thus it was very evident in the sixties, in some of the emergent arts of performance, that the dominant culture reached out to transform them or seek to transform them. In this process, of course, the dominant culture itself changes, not in its central formation, but in many of its articulated features. But then in a modern society it must always change in this way, if it is to remain dominant, if it is still to be felt as in real ways central in all our many activities and interests (14).

We shall see now how this conceptual work can be used to study the street theatre practice. The study is necessarily restricted to the practice in India though references for comparison and contrast may be drawn from elsewhere.

II

In the previous chapters we have seen how street theatre was born, and flourished. There are those who pronounced it, in different ways, ‘dead’. Even if the ‘death’ may only be an opinion, we can at least look at the other phases of its life. We will bring together here the details of the historical conditions in which the genre went and goes through in these phases. As with every human phenomenon, no genre is

born in a vacuum, but builds upon and revives certain aspects of a traditional genre, while negotiating with 'imported' influences.

Just like the hegemony exerted by the British rulers in colonial India in the areas of polity, education, administration and jurisprudence, the European influence that they were able to infiltrate into the artistic practice alone in India is quite considerable.

Before going into the question of British hegemony in theatre practice, it is useful to see how the British, in general, viewed at their own 'civilizing' agenda vis-a-vis the literatures and cultures of India. Susie Tharu has investigated in the Foucaldian method "the beginnings of what was a founding relationship, often warm, sometimes embittered, but always intimate, and always dominative, between English literature and Indian literatures" (162). The British deemed it their responsibility to lay the foundations for a national language and a national literature. On this subject Charles Travelyan, a British civil servant in India, in his *On the Education of the People of India*, said as early as the 1830s:

> The vernacular dialects of India, will, by the same process, be united among themselves. This diversity among languages is one of the greatest existing obstacles to improvement in India. But when English shall everywhere be established as the language of education, when the vernacular literature shall everywhere be formed from materials drawn from this source, and according to models furnished by this prototype, a strong tendency to assimilation will be created. Both the matter and the

> manner will be the same. Saturated from the same source, recast in the same mould, with a common science, a common standard of taste, a common nomenclature, the national languages as well as the national character will be consolidated....We shall leave a united and enlightened nation where we found a people broken up into sections...and depressed by literary systems, designed much more with a view to check the progress, than to promote the advance, of the human mind (Qtd. in Tharu 166).

The colonial establishment encouraged production of translations, under strict European supervision or that of western educated Indians, from the classical languages of Sanskrit and Arabic as well as English into the vernaculars. Production of original works in the vernaculars was encouraged with moral caveats (Tharu 166-171). The British carried out their agenda in yet another way:

> Never as explicitly stated as the policy of promoting translation, or that of encouraging the creation of original works, but in many ways more assiduously pursued, was a selective *marginalization* and *delegitimation* of existing literatures and literary practices, and the constitution of a classical Indian literary tradition (Ibid. 171).

For instance, in the early twentieth century, the efforts of Bangalore Nagaratnamma, a scholar and patron of arts, to publish a nineteenth century epic poem, were strongly censured for the poem's erotic content unsuitable for public consumption (Ibid. 171).

In the field of education also, extreme care was taken with regard to educating the natives. “It was repeatedly emphasised that the process of education called for careful supervision, preferably European, both inside the classroom and outside it (Ibid. 174).

In a seminal work, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India,* Gauri Viswanathan also studies how the content of English literary education was adapted to the administrative and political imperatives of British rule and “the ways in which these imperatives in turn charged that content with a radically altered significance, enabling the humanistic ideals of enlightenment to coexist with and indeed even support education for social and political control” (3).

In this context, an analogy of the Indian drama (not street theatre) may be telling in that it provides both a difference and a similarity with street theatre in the way “hegemony” has operated in complex ways. In case of Telugu, one of the widely spoken languages of India, modern drama took shape in the late nineteenth century, more specifically with Gurajada Apparao’s *Kanyasulkam*, which in its form and content radically differed with the dramatic tradition prevalent till that time. The drama dealt with a progressive theme of critiquing the decadent social practices of bride-selling and the related issues of child widows and widow-remarriage. These social values that Gurajada critiqued constituted, in Raymond Williams’ words, the “central, effective and dominant system of meanings and values, which are not merely abstract but which are organized and lived” (9) during Gurajada’s time. Another major departure that the drama achieved was from the ‘literary’ or ‘bookish’ language which was till then the accepted language

for writing in preference to a colloquial language as it was spoken in real life. A new social order characterised by rejection of feudal value system and brahmanical world view gained currency mainly owing to the exposure of the Indian middle class intellectuals to the English literature in particular and generally, through English, to the European literature. This exposure of the Indian middle class was aided by a growing potential readership due to increasing literacy, ideas of democratisation of education and advocacy on employing colloquial language in writing rather than 'bookish' language to make writing more accessible to neo-literate readers. The rise of newspapers also helped in increasing readership and helped, in the spirit of enlightened self-interest in gaining currency for these progressive ideas (Ranganathacharyulu 67)**.** The dominant value system in the pre-modern Indian society was challenged and replaced by a value system propagated through education by the ruling class of the British clearly supporting Williams's observation that "The educational institutions are usually the main agencies of the transmission of an effective dominant culture, and this is now a major economic as well as cultural activity; indeed it is both in the same moment" (9).

However, Tharu notes how the initial encouragement that the colonisers gave to the production of vernacular literatures not only achieved its objective of turning the Indians into willing subjects, which is how hegemony operated, also gave rise to profound self-reflection and resistance from the educated to the coloniser's rule. She says, "I believe we can read much of the fiction of the last decades of the nineteenth century as having used narrative as a political means of opposing or subverting the imperialist politics of the Enlightenment, while claiming its

democratic aspirations for subject peoples" (170). It is not a coincidence then that the development of the Indian literature in its modern form and of the anti-colonial struggle, for which English education and proliferation of Western ideas of modernity, democracy, nation-state, liberty, equality and fraternity contributed, took parallel trajectories.

In a similar vein, congenial conditions were created in India for the rise of street theatre – on one hand in the form, as one of the ideal forms for social protest, and on the other in the content, which was socialist, anti-imperialist, and anti-feudalist in its thrust. While experiments in traditional drama itself were in full swing in the general and, probably mainly aesthetic, concern of serious dramatists about the experiential impact of drama on the spectators, about the distance between the spectator and the performer, and about the passive role that the spectator has been assigned in the proscenium theatrical form; such erasure of distance became the reality and the very existential need for the cultural vanguard of people's movements.

In the general context of the colonial hegemony, of particular significance to the present study is of course the colonial hegemony in theatrical practice. This colonial legacy was so 'deeply saturated' into the Indian intellectual psyche that it has been accepted as a 'natural' progressive development by many theatre practitioners even today as evident in their practice of naturalistic and realistic theatre. In fact, the history of theatre, particularly of street theatre is a saga of 'layered hegemony'. These layers will be uncovered in the following discussion.

The derision of Indian art forms and the morally degenerative influence they are likely to have on the audience has been part of the colonial discourse, as seen above in Tharu's discussion of the processes of marginalisation and delegitimation of indigenous art forms (Cf. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's observations in Chapter II). Later nineteenth century saw the flourishing of Indian theatre especially in metropolitan centres of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay attracting a large middle-class audience. This urban drama was influenced by the Anglo-European traditions (Bhatia xv). However, the paradox of simultaneous influence of European Drama and that of Sanskrit Drama (that had gained its reputation by then due to Orientalist scholarship and translation of much Sanskrit literature into English). The local conventions were not always approved by critics schooled in the traditions of European drama. And so with the newly restored reputation, Sanskrit drama became another model for the new drama (Partha Chatterjee qtd. in Bhatia xv-xvi). Commenting about the attention to Sanskrit drama in exclusion to drama in vernacular languages in the historiography of theatre by Orientalist scholars, Rakesh Solomon remarks:

> A part of the blame for such privileging of Sanskrit theatre lies in the historical context that gave birth to Indology in the mid-eighteenth century. Europeans eager to investigate Indian's ancient past inevitably relied on brahman priests and scholars who were by tradition the sole preservers, transmitters and guardians of Sanskrit texts, whether religious or secular. The brahman's pride in Sanskrit culture and belief in its superiority over all other Indian traditions coloured the early Indologists' interpretations (14).

Solomon in his study of historiography of Indian Theatre, unravels the biases of not only these Western Indologists, but also the early Indian theatre historians like R.K. Yajnik and Hemendranath Das Gupta. While the former wrote his history under the thrall of the European-influenced drama in India, the latter showed clear regional bias (in favour of Bengal) and against folk theatre forms like *Bhavai* of Gujarat (18-20).

It is here – in the privileging of classical art forms against folk forms – that we begin to encounter the second layer of hegemony in the genealogy of theatre in India, the first being, as is clear from the description above of the colonial agenda, that of the European drama. Here we can truly see, to use Susie Tharu's words for a different context, 'an arrangement of an alliance' between the dominant culture of the Europe and the 'classical' brahmanical culture of India.

In the context of continuation of this hegemony transferred by the coloniser to the Hindu brahmanical culture, let us look at some attitudes:

The strains of residual and emergent cultures had been present in Indian theatre for quite long. If we consider emergent culture as that of egalitarian social order, the first social protest play *Nildarpan* that challenged the colonial subjugation of the indigo farmers belonged to that culture taken forward almost ninety years later by IPTA. It was written by Dinbandhu Mitra in Bengali in 1859 and inspired many towards such plays (Dharwadker 28). The play was in a way responsible for the creation of a formal censorship policy by the colonial government through the

Dramatic Performances Control Act of 1876. It is probable that many *Nildarpan*s might have emerged but for the strict censorship. Thus the Bengali theatre "turned away from the topicality and specificity of political issues and invested its energies in the performance of an imagined national identity that was rooted in orientalist thinking but that could supposedly challenge imperialism itself" (Ibid. 29). Taking Bankim Chandra Chatterji's example, Partha Chatterjee describes this turning away:

> [T]his pseudo-reclamation of national power was enacted largely by and for an elite stage, not to claim independence from colonial rule, not really to vivify national pride either (although that was the project under which it was often presented). Its real function was to assuage the battered ego of a "privilegentsia" trying hard to construct an identity while accommodating the ignominy of being understrapped colonial subjects. The operation thus inevitably rested on elision on one side, and fabrication on the other" (Qtd. in Dharwadker 29).

The strategy of fabrication when it refers to the imagined glorious past of the Indian civilization also fits well within the *residual culture*, in which some of the Indian intelligentsia chose to work. This strain continues today in India in a majoritarian religious fundamentalism arrogantly resting on a fabricated past.

Further, Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker identifies three events in the history of Indian theatre, which are "metonymically" connected to three successive phases: "the formation of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) in May 1943;

the deliberations of the first Drama Seminar organized by the newly constituted Sangeet Natak Akademi (the National Academy of the Performing Arts) in April 1956; and the two-week Nehru Shatabdi Natya Samaroh (Nehru Centenary Theatre Festival), also organised by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, in September 1989" (25). All three events aimed at a pan-Indian concern vis-a-vis theatre. IPTA's active role in reviving traditional folk forms for mobilising masses for anti-imperialist and anti-fascist struggles has been mentioned in a previous chapter. However, the IPTA upsurge mellowed to a large extent after 1952 ["declined rapidly because of a number of internal and external problems..." is Dharwadker's description (26)]. It continues to exist, though not as a national body, in many regions like Bihar, Rajasthan, Jammu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana with relatively moderate activity and often by assuming regional names. We have also seen that Janam, which has become almost a synonym for street theatre in India today, is an offshoot of IPTA. One of the Janam members Sudhanva Deshpande acknowledges IPTA's enduring legacy – "the radical legacy of IPTA – its emphasis on theatre for the people; its efforts to revitalize wherever possible the 'traditional arts'; its efforts to build a people's theatre movement under the political guidance, at least initially, of the (then undivided) Communist Party – this radical legacy continues to inspire street theatre of the Left today" (Qtd. in Dharwadker 32).

The 1956 Drama Seminar focussed on self-positioning with regard to the future trajectory that national theatre of India should take in the wake of the country's freedom from the colonial shackles. While reviewing the past initiatives in Indian theatre, though discussions were held on the ill-effects of commercial Parsi theatre

on the stagnation in theatrical experimentation, and of naturalism and realism in theatre imported from the West, the neglect that traditional and folk forms suffered during the colonial rule, and the need to revive them, no substantial acknowledgement was recorded towards the dynamic contributions made by the IPTA in the previous decade despite the presence of former and the then present members of IPTA like Mulk Raj Anand and Balraj Sahni (Ibid. 37-41). On this (calculated?) elision, Dharwadker comments:

> ...[I]n the absence of even one focused presentation, the debate over the IPTA at the seminar is neither systematic nor substantial. Statist discourse about Indianness, tradition, and a "national theatre" in the mid-1950s clearly cannot acknowledge the transformative effects of left-oriented activist theatre, and the jaded criticism during the seminar merely foreshadows the formal dissolution of the IPTA as a national organisation in 1957 (Ibid.41).

The third event that Dharwadker marks as a symbolic milestone, the 1989 Nehru Shatabdi Samaroh, captured a retrospect of post-Independence theatre. It is significant that the Festival chose to accommodate Shombu Mitra's *Nabanna*, the first play in the IPTA repertoire, a theatrical triumph in 1944 when it was first produced. Utpal Dutt and Habib Tanvir, who had initially contributed to IPTA's growth, but moved away and practised brilliant theatre, were also represented at this Festival. The IPTA legacy continued in their autonomous practices in that they continued to engage with folk forms and in the true spirit of people's theatre. Dharwadker points out that "their unquestionable significance to the post-

independence tradition vindicates both that connection [with IPTA] and its dissolution in the interests of artistic autonomy" (47). (But it needs to be highlighted here that the dissolution of their connection with IPTA cannot be plausibly explained in terms of 'artistic autonomy', given their continued commitment to people's theatre even after the 'dissolution'.)

Apart from token remarks about IPTA's contribution, though IPTA was accused in the 1956 Drama Seminar of having "reduced Art to a handmaid to politics" under the pressures of party loyalty and propaganda (Ibid.41) by vague universalists and humanists, in line with the argument in this section we can conclude that the revisionism in the Communist Party, to which IPTA was affiliated, in aligning with the ruling Congress (and its strange ideology of "Nehruvian Socialism") that had earlier brutally suppressed the revolts of the working class and exhibited its class nature, which is responsible for the crisis and decline of IPTA as a national organisation. With the decadence in the Communist Party in betraying the working class, IPTA lost its self-confidence as the harbinger of an *emergent culture.*

It is also significant that the 1956 Seminar provided space for the initiative for a 'Theatre of the Roots' movement in Indian theatre that aimed to experiment with contemporising folk and traditional forms of India. The agenda of this state-sponsored Seminar is apparent. The establishment sought to re-appropriate the traditional and folk forms which had been wrested in the people's cause by IPTA. In other words, this 'revivalist' tendency towards these art forms is distinctly in contrast with the 'people-centred' approach of IPTA. Pointing out to how the *base*

of relations of production operate on and affect the *superstructural* practices like theatre, Sudhanva Despande remarks in 2008:

> As government and [Ford] foundation funding for it has receded, the 'theatre of the roots' movement has more or less run out of steam today. The roots themselves, the agrarian economy and social structure, are in the midst of an unprecedented crisis. Rural arts as a whole, not just theatre, cannot survive, let alone thrive, if the people that nourish it continue to die. The worst of it is that nobody seems to give a damn (29).

Deshpande's remark indirectly upholds the line of integration of politics and theatre taken up by IPTA. Theatre is not a museum piece to be displayed for a curious foreign tourist or even the kind of legacy that needs to be sustained for the sake of keeping up the tradition, through funding by corporate foundations. It is integral to people's daily life and any theatre that ignores the rest of the people's life can only be lifeless, static and uninspiring.

In spite of the 'running out of steam' of the 'theatre of the roots' movement, that the bias continued towards especially the protest form of street theatre in the historiography of theatre in India was discussed in Chapter I.

As Raymond Williams insists, "We have to emphasize that hegemony is not singular; indeed that its own internal structures are highly complex, and have continually to be renewed, recreated and defended; and by the same token, that they can be continually challenged and in certain respects modified" (8). The

appropriation of the people's art forms such as street theatre by agencies, whether of state or of non-state nature, that have least regard for people's lives is the way the *dominant culture* "incorporates" forms of dissent and 'hegemonises' the people's consciousness into a resignation from which only people's movements aided by a cultural vanguard such as IPTA can draw them out through a dialogue, thus 'challenging' the hegemony of the dominant culture and, at least, 'modifying' it.

III

For several historical reasons, street theatre especially in India came to be identified with protest, an anti-establishment stance of the Left politics. One reason might be the association in people's imagination between the genre and Left wing politics. Another reason may be the conviction with which street theatre is taken to the people by trained but committed activists in the Left wing theatre groups; whereas the Right wing or Centrist parties that use street theatre occasionally may employ paid artistes who may not normally show the kind of conviction and commitment of the Left wing activists – this may also be true in the case of many NGOs and the government. It is a fact that the street theatre production of the Left variety is far more effective, even technically. Probably this may be due to the fact of its sheer legacy.

As for the street theatre practice of Koshish Theatre Group, Koshish as an organisation is uniquely placed. It is practically not an autonomous street theatre group like Janam. Nor is it affiliated to any political party. Though Koshish itself

is registered as an NGO, it is now promoted and sponsored by COVA, another NGO whose interest is in the conveying of the messages on communal harmony mainly and social evils like dowry, gender discrimination, and civic issues, in the hope that an artistic medium would better impact people. Apart from the plays such as the ones on health and nutrition issues that Koshish does when it accepts an assignment from a government programme, another NGO or a private organisation, all other issues that it dealt with, (in accordance with the requirements of the thrust areas of intervention of COVA) relate to communal harmony, civic rights, citizenship rights, harmony across the Indo-Pak borders and are deeply political. But the question is whether COVA operating under the permission and privileges granted through legal systems like Societies Registration Act and Foreign Contribution Regulatory Act and 80G certification for Income Tax exemption for donations made to it, can afford to deal with them as politically as they should be. Though in theory the government is of the people, by the people and for the people, it is a known fact that dissent is tolerated by any government in power only to a certain extent.

Governments have been known to use direct coercion towards NGOs that participated in what the government perceived as 'political activity'. Orissa government in 2005 seriously contemplated bringing a legislation to hold NGOs accountable to the government, accusing them of being party to anti-government activities. On the other hand, NGOs claim that such legislation:

> ... is quite obviously being brought in to check those organisations which are working for the people, and in fact trying to ensure the implementation

> of the constitutional provisions and progressive Acts like the 73rd Amendment, the Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas Act, the Minimum Wages Act, and even addressing violation of fundamental rights of the tribal people and Dalits in the State. So we have a situation where the State will actively act against those people who are working to put into place the laws of the country. NGOs and the media should question such a draconian effort to control civil society. There is also a crying need to address the inhuman scale of violations of basic constitutional rights that are going on (Qtd. in Das).

Especially, in a context when undesirable aspects of *residual culture* are vying for and succeeding in their attempts for hegemony, moving from an oppositional (to the secular credentials of the once dominant) to dominant culture, the danger is all the more immanent for all secular forces. As Sudhanva Deshpande observes in 2008, "There is no question, however, that the biggest danger to performers in today's India comes from the Hindu Right. Habib Tanvir and his Naya Theatre actors were made the target of vicious, sustained, and pinpointed attacks in several cities of Madhya Pradesh for a play called *Ponga Pandit*, also called *Jamadarin"* (30-31). Deshpande explains that this play, which belongs to the old Nacha folk tradition, had been performed since 1935 and began to be attacked only in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition (Ibid. 31).

So it appears likely that its identity as an NGO is likely to jeopardize the activity of Koshish Theatre Group, if the issues taken up in the *agit-prop* mode of Koshish

take on a more militant posture, as they should, to be impactful. This is a distinct limitation that Koshish faces today.

However, it is also possible that Koshish can subtly subvert the dominant culture, which is at the present moment, more than at any other point in the post-Independence social history of India, characterised by majoritarian religious fundamentalism and communalism, even in the space that it currently enjoys. For this manoeuvre, what is required for Koshish is not only a lot of creativity but also a deep sense of what actually it is doing. This is of course not as easy as it sounds, given the conditions that Koshish comprises children and teenagers and a few youth as its members and actors (who move on to other things later, or who may not sufficiently understand the issues), and that they are not activists in any real sense of the term. They are being trained in technical aspects of performance (and how much of it is street-theatre-specific needs a review – this aspect will be addressed elsewhere in this chapter) by professionals right from its inception. In spite of the difficulties, they also need proper training in their ideology, in understanding the issues that they deal with, in connecting with the issues on a personal level. Although they imbibe the mission of COVA which is to bring together people of different communities on a platform for peaceful coexistence and participate in activities for harmony such as volunteering during Ganesh Procession and in organising Joint Celebration of Festivals etc, a certain analytical appreciation of the issues is possible only through 'politicising' them, so to speak. The artistes in Koshish should be trained as activists. Otherwise the very lack of certain sensitivity, for example towards gender issues, among the artistes will counteract the impact they may seek to create and provide bad role models. This is

also necessary in order for them to make an impact on people during performances and develop a capacity to intervene in the process of script preparation and of improvising during their performances.

The researcher understands that this is a tall order given the fact that the Left itself is facing a crisis proportionate to the growth of Hindu fundamentalism in this country, due to its inability to effectively articulate its principal contradiction with communalism, and the researcher also believes that only the Left can theoretically and not just idealistically but through political praxis counter the surge of communalism. Veterans in the Left movement of the 1950s and 1960s lament the death of political theatre and, as part of it, street theatre, in this country. While this may be brushed aside as extreme pessimism, it is worthwhile to consider their analysis. Pointing out that the decline of street theatre as a political tool is a worldwide phenomenon, not just restricted to India, G.P. Deshpande remarks in 1997:

> Street theatre assumes, in order to become an energetic and socially useful phenomenon, two things: one, that there is a rebel in society, a living rebel, and two, that the contradiction that the street theatre talks about in a given play extends outside the play as well, that the audiences are aware of, or can be made aware of, this contradiction, and that they can be mobilized to oppose this contradiction. This is a sense one does not get today. One got this sense in the 1950s and the 1960s. The reason for this I think is that Left politics in that period was much more in the oppositional mode. *In my view, street theatre is not primarily theatrical phenomenon. The health of*

street theatre is directly related to the health of the Left movement (97 – emphases mine).

G.P.Deshpande further opines that the Left does not articulate whether it has a principal contradiction with communalism (Ibid. 98). There is no significant Marxist analysis of communalism. If it is not theoretically articulated, the street theatre will also be not able to bring it out effectively in its message. “The play merely says, please be good boys, don’t hit each other. That is a message that will, I suspect, sound increasingly hollow, because everyone says only that...And if everyone is saying it, then what is the politics of it?” (Ibid. 98).

There needs to be no second thought about the proposition that one urgent issue Koshish has to tackle with is communalism. Apart from sermonising (*Hindu-Muslim Bhai Bhai*) or stereotypical messages, its street theatre should be able to address the issue more effectively. One reason for not being able to ‘call a spade a spade’ may be fear – that the street play may itself lead to riots, if things are spoken about openly. Another reason is the way we understand communalism has not changed much since long. For example, we have not understood the way global capital and communalism are in nexus, or how for communal groups/parties, communalism is a business (Deshpande, Sudhanva 1997, p.53). The relation between religion and communalism is another contentious issue we need to get clarity about. They are related. Though it may not be the case that every religious person can be communal, the distance between them is easily overcome by the propaganda of communal elements. On the other hand, it is not the case that a non-religious person will not be communal. If we want to use street

theatre effectively, we should find creative ways of presenting the issue. The manner of presentation should be able to demonstrate to the spectator the way to question, rather than to make him/her despair about the possibility of co-existence and the emptiness of noble ideas of brotherhood. Theatre Union's adaptation of Sadat Hasan Manto's story, "Toba Tek Singh" did this admirably according to some spectators. It was intended as a response to the Sikh riots in Delhi. But the response was delayed for a year due to the fact that the team did not know the form which can effectively represent the problem without causing further riots (Bartholomew 54). Here is an important lesson for Koshish in creative presentation about communalism.

Another aspect of performance that the researcher has observed in Koshish plays is the distinction they ignore between the stage production and street production. The demands of street theatre are different from those of proscenium theatre, although there are many similarities. The street theatre actor requires all the training a proscenium artiste would require. A street theatre team has to meticulously plan the entire production just as the stage production team does. In addition, because the venue is open for street theatre, the actors involved should show more ability to improvise depending on the locale, the noise, the distractions, the responses of spectators who enjoy more proximity with the actors. The actors also should cultivate their voice more, for example, to raise above the noisy surroundings, he/she may have to use a higher pitch than is warranted in the proscenium context. As Moloyashree Hashmi puts it, "A very, very important aspect of street theatre is that anyone watching it is doing so voluntarily. So instead of going shopping, that person has chosen to stand here and watch the

play. So this person has already walked two steps with the performer. Now it is up to the performer to take the audience the remaining distance" (44).

Another distinction of street theatre is that because of the short time available and attention span of the spectators, street theatre has to necessarily simplify its content (which is not the same as making it 'simplistic'). For example, it cannot afford to portray the subtle nuances of character, but necessarily depend on stereotypes and emblematic representations. It cannot always present 'rounded' characters. It cannot go into the complex analysis of the issues being tackled. However, this does not mean that street theatre has to depend on 'clichés'. The street theatre has to strike a fine balance between simplicity of presentation and freshness of approach. Otherwise, it cannot provide the spectator the experience of a fresh look at his/her own issues through its mediation. Also, street theatre need not forego its poetic quality. It can be lyrical. For example, the creative way in which Janam weaves Faiz's poetry can be a model for groups like Koshish.

One minor observation of this researcher is that Koshish, or through it COVA, does not utilise the opportunity of its performance in public places for dissemination of its ideas about communal harmony. It may add to the percolation of these ideas, if the team carries and distributes to the audience brief notes in the form of pamphlets, crisply explaining the issues being presented by the team in their performance. It ensures that the performance lives on in their thinking even after it is over and the message is likely to spread to others who are absent at the performance. As Malina of the Living Theatre observes matter-of-factly: "You have to have a leaflet explaining what you're doing; you have to have a sign

saying what you're doing or you'll be misrepresented in the press, if not misunderstood by passersby" (Malina qtd in Rosenthal in Cohen-Cruz 152). This also aids in building a community of patrons of street theatre in the old city of Hyderabad.

Though Koshish team has been getting opportunities to look at the work of other theatre groups across the country, they are more contexts of competitions in which it is highly unlikely that committed street theatre groups participate. A working together with a professional and politically conscious theatre group would bring about a transformation in the team, which has been fluid and so little experience to benefit from as a team, not only in terms of technique (whether it is of stagecraft or script-writing) but also in the ideology of their content. A policy of networking with likeminded groups at the national level will also strengthen the work of Koshish into a movement rather than a series of sporadic interventions.

The value of efforts like those of Koshish lies in its practice of alternative culture production, in which youth belonging to marginalized sections of society participate. Especially in an era when the domination of means of culture production is in the hands of big capital, the potential of this alternative and affirmative space for transforming the individuals involved in it in terms of their articulation and self-confidence is great. The fact that several youth are able to use this space and nurture aspirations for a better life is itself a vindication of the value of such efforts.

Lastly, this researcher would like to offer two models for Koshish for consideration of adopting in their work: one is Augusto Boal's Legislative Theatre (described in detail in Chapter II) and the other one is that of Janam (described in detail in Chapter III). These two models are offered for several reasons: one is because both of them have been successfully practiced in the urban context. Boal has experimented with the Legislative Theatre in the city of Rio de Janeiro, even while he was one of the City Councillors during 1991-1996 for promoting participatory citizenship and law-making. "This method is now being adapted by the Nepalese theatre group Aarohan in a unique theatre project that is meant to form part of the process of constitutional reform in the one-time Himalayan kingdom" (Bala). COVA's work on citizenship rights and of campaigns on inclusive administration in Hyderabad parallels the aims of the Legislative Theatre. Closer home, Jana Sanskriti Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed does it effectively in the rural areas of West Bengal. The Centre's experiences in the rural context may be useful for adaptation for Koshish in its own urban context. As the other model, Janam has been working in dangerous conditions in Delhi for the past three decades and more, again in an urban context on issues such as communal conflict and civic rights, which COVA and Koshish can easily identify with. Both the models would also provide the Koshish team with a strong ideological base and technical training. Adaptation of one or both of such models may also help Koshish to become part of a movement as mentioned above.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I:

Bradass87: A Play about Chelsea Manning

A 6'x9' rectangle is made on the ground with rope or tape or chalk. Cpl Kelly stands at parade rest facing the audience at one of the corners. BRADLEY's long imprisonment shows in the heaviness of his small but once fit body. The overwhelming loneliness from the isolation he's experiencing is the palpable setting that the desire to communicate springs from. His mind begins to race and energy is building up inside of him. He looks anxiously a couple of times towards Cpl Kelly. He keeps his gaze on the guard while he slowly creeps to the floor and does as many push-ups as he can get away with before KELLY sees him and shouts.

KELLY

Prisoner! *(BRADLEY snaps to attention)* exercising at any time other than your mandatory supervised recreation time is a violation of this facility for subjects being detained at Suicide Risk Status.

(Silence)

(CWO4 AVERHART enters. KELLY salutes him and AVERHART returns the salute. KELLY returns to parade rest while COMMANDER approaches BRADLEY.)

COMMANDER

Approach the door prisoner.

(BRADLEY approaches the door and stands at attention looking straight ahead like a good soldier.)

COMMANDER

Can you explain to me what happened today at recreation call prisoner?

BRADLEY

Permission to address the Chief Warrant Officer.

COMMANDER

Aye, prisoner.

BRADLEY

Well Sergeant I was just trying to follow orders but-

COMMANDER

I am the commander.

BRADLEY

Aye.

COMMANDER

Why did you violate my trust?

BRADLEY

Sir, I—

COMMANDER

Why are you a detainee that wants to cause trouble?

BRADLEY

Sir, I don't know. I don't want to cause—I don't want to cause—I'm not trying to cause any situations or anything like that. I apologize for any confusion. I—

COMMANDER

Do I need to take away your recreation call?

BRADLEY

Sir, I have been a model detainee at this facility for six months. My psychiatrist, Captain Hoctor and Captain Malone have recommended that I be removed from Prevention of Injury Staus. My counselor Gunnery Sargeant Blenis has consistently given me a very high rating and says he wishes he had one hundred Detainee Mannings—

COMMANDER

I am the Commander and you are a junior enlisted detainee. I am the one giving orders. No one can tell me what to do. I am, for all practical purposes, ‘God.’

BRADLEY

(slips out) Please stop yelling at me. You still have to follow Brig procedures. Everyone has a boss they have to answer to.

(Pause. The Commander is shocked and enraged and trying to maintain composure and figure out what he’s going to do with BRADLEY.)

COMMANDER

Permission to address the CWO4 is revoked. *(to the other guards)* Special move. Suicide Risk!

BRADLEY

I don’t believe in good guys versus bad guys anymore, I only see a plethora of states acting in self-interest, with varying ethics and moral standards of course, but self-interest nonetheless. I mean, we’re better in some respects, we’re much more subtle; use a lot more words and legal techniques to legitimize everything. It’s better than disappearing in the middle of the night. But just because something is more subtle, doesn’t make it right.

I guess I’m too idealistic.–

KELLY

You are currently classified *(BRADLEY is interrupted and snaps to attention)* at SRS status because you are a harm to yourself and others. It is my duty to ensure your safety. Confirm your wellbeing Prisoner.

BRADLEY

Aye, sir.

I think the thing that got me the most; that made me rethink the world more than anything, was watching 15 detainees taken by the Iraqi Federal Police for printing "anti-Iraqi literature". The Iraqi federal police wouldn't cooperate with US forces, so I was instructed to investigate the matter, find out who the "bad guys" were, and how significant this was for the FPs. It turned out they had printed a scholarly critique against Prime Minister Maliki, I had an interpreter read it for me, and when I found out that it was a benign political critique titled "Where did the money go?" and following the corruption trail within the Prime Minister's cabinet, I immediately took that information and *ran* to the officer to explain what was going on- he didn't want to hear any of it. He told me to shut up and explain how we could assist the FPs in finding *MORE* detainees.

BRADLEY

Everything started slipping after that; I saw things differently. I had always questioned the way things worked, and investigated to find the truth, but that was a point where I was a *part* of something, I was actively involved in something that I was completely against.–

BRADLEY

But I was a part of it, and completely helpless.

BRADLEY

I kept that in my mind for weeks, probably a month and a half, before I forwarded it to them. It was unreal, I mean, I've identified bodies before, it's rare to do so, but usually it's just some nobody. It humanized the whole thing, re-sensitized me. *(crying and fighting the tears)* I'm just, weird I guess. I can't separate myself from others. I feel connected to everybody, like they were distant family. I… care?

BRADLEY

We're human… and we're killing ourselves… and no one seems to see that… and it bothers me. Apathy. Apathy is far worse than the active participation.

I prefer the painful truth over any blissful fantasy.

KELLY

You are *(BRADLEY snaps to attention)* currently classified at Suicide Risk status, which means you are a harm to yourself and others. It is my duty to ensure your safety. Confirm your wellbeing prisoner.

BRADLEY

Aye, sir

I'm not brave, I'm weak.

BRADLEY

I'm not so much scared of getting caught and facing consequences at this point, as I am of being misunderstood, and never having the chance to live the life I wanted to.

an audience member starts yelling one of these lines over and over again from the crowd. One of the guards handcuffs Bradley and takes him out of the cell while the other goes into the crowd and throws the screaming audience member into the cell. Silence.

Bradley watches, amazed until another audience member starts shouting another line and is restrained and thrown in the cell while the first is removed. This pattern continues.

Potential audience lines (they can choose the one that resonates with them):

-Living such an opaque life, has forced me never to take transparency, openness, and honesty for granted.

-They've got a lot of ammunition; it's the support they need from the public in publishing the material coming through soon.

-If you had free reign over classified networks for long periods of time, say, 8-9 months, and you saw incredible things, awful things, things that belonged in the public domain, and not on some server stored in a dark room in Washington DC. What would you do?

-Things that would have an impact on 6.7 billion people. Explaining how the first world exploits the third, in detail, from an internal perspective

-It affects everybody on earth, everywhere there's a US post there's a diplomatic scandal that will be revealed.

-Its Important that it gets out. I feel, for some bizarre reason. It might actually change something.

-I just couldn't let these things stay inside of the system. Inside of my head. I recognized the value of some things, knew what they meant, dug deeper.

-God knows what happens now. Hopefully worldwide discussion, debates, and reforms. If not, than we're doomed. As a species.

-I want people to see the truth, regardless of who they are; because without information, you cannot make informed decisions as a public.

-Listened and lip-synced to Lady Gaga's Telephone while exfiltrating possibly the largest data spillage in American history.

-Because it's public data. It belongs in the public domain. Information should be free.

Enemies of the State Rally NYC Public Library 10/26/12

[http://bradass87.wordpress.com/street-theater-script/]

Appendix – II:

Koshish Repertoire[5]

Plays on Communal Harmony and National Integration

Saare Jahan Se Achcha/National Integration/Mano to dev ya to pathar

This mime, a creation by the Koshish team itself, won accolades for its creatively pithy portrayal of how the narrow outlooks of people of different faiths can converge to create a symbol of peace and brotherhood.

Concept & Design: Koshish *Duration:* 8 min. *No. of Actors:* 6

No. of performances so far: 350

Sab Sey Sasta Gosht

The title means the 'cheapest of meats'. In stylized theatre, the present play focuses on how innocent are divided on the basis of religion and are used by the corrupt and selfish politicians for their personal benefit. *This play, which is probably the first play that Koshsih performed, will be analysed in more detail a little later in this chapter.*

Script: Dr. Asghar Wajahat *Duration:* 15 min. *No. of Actors:* 12

No. of performances so far: 200

Ram Aur Raheem

The play *Ram aur Raheem* through rib-tickling humour focuses on how two individuals having differences between them fight as one force to eradicate communalism.

Concept: Koshish *Script:* Aamer Hashmi *Duration:* 35 min. *No. of Actors:* 11

No. of performances so far: 6

Rahim Chotu with Family

In this play, conceived as a sequel to *Ram aur Raheem*, sharp satire on communal feelings, social evils like dowry system, discrimination towards eunachs, irresponsible behaviour of youth etc.

Concept & Script: Aamer Hashmi *Duration:* 1 hr. *No. of Actors:* 19

[5] For the information on Koshish Theater Group the researcher relied on its blog (http://koshishtheatregroup.blogspot.in), and personal interviews which are cited at appropriate places.

No. of performances so far: 6

Mera Bharat Mahaan

Originally scripted by Dr. Asghar Wajahat, this short play contrasts the sacrifices made by the freedom fighters of this country with the present situation characterized by division of society on religious, caste and regional lines.

Script: Dr. Asghar Wajahat *Duration:* 45 min. *No. of Actors:* 14

No. of performances so far: 2

Maanush

The human race has been divided into different groups in the name of God. But one should realise that god is one and that though the paths are different the goal is the same. The play Maanush underscores this point through an experimental presentation, which is a mix of mime and stylized theatre.

Adapted from the original script of: Dr. Asghar Wajahat *Duration:* 45 min
No. of Actors: 14

No. of performances so far:2

On Gender Discrimination

Hamen Jeene Do

As the title suggests, this play expresses the anguish of girls who want to study in the midst of various kinds of harassment by the male-dominated society.

Script: Muskaan Yousufi Duration: 20 min. No. of Actors: 8

No. of performances so far: 2

On Civic Issues

Kyonki Sach Kadua Hota Hai

This is a play designed to create awareness among the people of Old City of Hyderabad about their rights with regard to basic facilities like Education, Water supply, Electricity, etc with suggestions to overcome their problems.

Concept & Script: Koshish *Duration:* 25 min. *No. of Actors:* 12

No. of performances so far: 15

Nutrition

A Play staged for 12 Schools of Old City in collaboration with National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) on the occasion of World Food Day highlighting the need of Nutritious food and its benefits.

Concept & Script: Koshish & NIN *Duration:* 30 min. *No. of Actors:* 14

No. of performances so far: 8

Taleem aur Jahalat

This play focuses on the issue of literacy and its advantages.

Concept & Design: Muskaan Yousufi *Duration:* 20 min. *No. of Actors:* 8

No. of Performances so far: 6

TB *Se Jung*

This play specifically deals with the tuberculosis. Through entertaining action and dialogue, it is designed to spread awareness on prevention and treatment of TB.

Concept: Mahavir Hospitals *Design:* Mirza Hamed Baig *Duration:* 30 min.
No. of Actors: 8 *No. of performances so far:* 6

Shadi* to *Barbadi, Vajah Paani

This comedy sends across a strong message for conservation of water. Shortage of water in a family comes in the way of a marriage. The dispute is solved by the family finding a way out of the problem through rainwater harvesting.

Concept & Script: Koshish *Duration:* 35 min. *No. of Actors:* 17

No. of performances so far: 2

Comedies

Do Chor Hason Mat

This rib-tickling comedy deals with the antiques of two prisoners who escape from a prison.

Concept & Script: Koshish *Duration:* 20 min. *No. of Actors:* 8

No. of performances so far: 15

Filmi Chakkar

This comic satire revolves around the adventures of a director-turned-mental patient, who tries to direct a film after escaping from an asylum.

Concept & Script: Koshish *Duration:* 45 min. *No. of Actors:* 12

No. of performances so far:7

Five Gangster Class Ke Andar

This is a comedy depicting the efforts of a gang of goons who want to learn English and in the process get caught by the police.

Script: Aamer Hashmi *Duration:* 20 min. *No. of Actors:* 9

No. of performances so far: 2

Appendix – III:

Some Achievements of Koshish Theatre Group[6]

- Koshish Theatre Group bagged 1st prize for its play, Maanush, at State Level Competitions organized in January 2004 by the Department of Culture and Department of Youth Services, Government of Andhra Pradesh coinciding with the National Youth Festival. Koshish was placed 3rd at the National Level Competition organized in the same month at Tata Nagar, Jamshedpur.

- At the national level Hindi One-Act Play Competitions organized in March 2004 by Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha, Koshish Theatre Group secured 1st prize.

- Koshish in collaboration with another theatre group produced *Andha Yug* at Ravindra Bharati, Hyderabad in July 2003 featuring 42 actors on the stage.

- Koshish has participated in the fifth International Theatre Festival organized in Delhi by National School of Drama. The Group also participated in National Level Theatre Festivals held in Kerala, Orissa and Chennai.

- The child artistes of Koshish Theatre Group participated in International Children's Theatre Festival at Kolkatta in August 2004.

- Koshish team performed at national institutions in Hyderabad like IICT, NIN, IIIT and National Police Academy.

- Koshish performances were facilitated by NGOs and NGO Networks like Apna Watan, Aman Biradari, Friends of Iran Society, government departments like Hyderabad Traffic Police, and established educational institutions like St Ann's School, Sharada Vidyalaya, Boys' Town High School, New Grammar High School, Iqra Mission School and others.

- In the *Theatre Festival* that Koshish organised on January 27-28, 2005, more than thirty teams from across Hyderabad participated in the inter-school and inter-college competitions.

- Koshish team participated in the Second National Children's Theatre Festival in Kolkata in May 2005.

- Koshish Team bagged 4 Awards for the Play "Ram Son of Rahim" and also for the Best Folk Dance at the 6thAll India Classical Music, Dance, Folk Dance and Drama Festival. The event was organised as part of the Bharat Sanskriti Utsav at Burdwan, West Bengal, India from 25th to 31st December 2012. The Best Play Award Winner "Ram Son of Rahim", based on the theme of communal harmony, was written and directed by Dr. Gopikrishna, Coordinator of COVA – Koshish TheatreGroup. Dr. Ali Ahmad also won the First Prize for Folk Dance. The Play had a cast of 9 actors with 7 members providing back stage support.

[6] These achievements are gleaned from the Koshish blog and brochures of COVA.