

THEATRE INTERNATIONAL

UGC Approved Peer-Reviewed
Multi-disciplinary International Journal
UGC Serial No. - 49202
Currently Indexed in UGC-CARE LIST
Vol. XIV



Eds.

Amitava Roy, Bryan Reynolds, Papia Mitra, Sheila T. Cavanagh, Subir Dhar, Tapu Biswas

A

Special Publication of
The Shakespeare Society of Eastern India

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Front Cover: Top Panel Left: Gertrude (Manashi Singha Ray) & Hamlet (Amitava Roy) in close embrace, Closet Scene. || *Top Panel Right :* Lady Macbeth (Manashi) imagines giving suck to her babe (Miura Roy Basu) in a workshop production at ICCR Kolkata
Bottom panel : Left: Hamlet (Amitava Roy) with Clown (Tapu Biswas) in Grave Digger Scene with Yorick's skull. || *Right:* Hamlet (Amitava) attacking Ophelia (Sabita Chakraborty) with Teddy Bear in Nunnery Scene in workshop at SSEI

Back Cover : Left: Hamlet with Gertrude dipping into the wisdom of Professor Burnett's *Hamlet and World Cinema* in between workshop sessions. || *Right:* Hamlet (Roy) attacking Ophelia (Rukmini Roy Basu) with Teddy Bear in another performance of the Nunnery scene in a workshop at ICCR, Kolkata.

Pix: Tapu Biswas & Rukmini Roy Basu for TI

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From the Editors' Desk

Dear readers,

Theatre International once again has braved the pandemic and yet another lockdown to continue its work nourished by your good will. We published our last volume in 2020. Now we are here at Kolkata Book Fair to greet you with the latest offering of our oeuvre.

Dr. Tapu Biswas has picked the extremely interesting topic of adaptation of Ibsen's seminal play *Doll's House* in the Bengali middle class context. Ibsen's play was about how an ordinary housewife who had always thought herself to be lucky and happy woke up to the realization that society regards her as little more than a doll. Sombhu Mitra adapted this play in Bengali as *Putul Khela* or Playing with Dolls. The characters are given Bengali names and they lead a typical Bengali lifestyle in a Bengali city. Dr. Biswas has focused on how Sombhu Mitra managed to set a Norwegian play in the Bengali context. In the process he points out it has become a transcreation, not just simply an adaptation.

Asmita Boral focuses on the adaptation of a novel, *Frankenstein* in dramatic performance. In particular she analyses Danny Boyle's twin productions of the novel which emphasize alterity. Frankenstein and his creature are one integrated whole. She points out how dexterous use of lightning, ritual-like actions, dances make us think not so much about the monster itself but about the power of the 'abject' and question the human condition itself.

Dr. Saurabh Kumar Singh & Dr. Ashutosh Singh turns their attention on *Crossing to Talikota*, the last play by Girish Karnad which is a dramatic re-interpretation of the fall of the Vijayanagara empire. They tie Karnad's understanding of Deccani political history with New Historicism. Karnad shows the folly and arrogance of the politically immature king

Rama Raya which leads to the Sultans plotting against him which eventually culminates in defeat in battle and destruction of the empire. They point out that Karnad repeatedly emphasizes this was not a religious conflict and we must understand the cultures and people of the past through many voices than presenting an unidirectional history.

Dr. Bhaskar Kumar Das critically studies Manjula Padmanabhan's plays with regard to her innovative dramaturgy and motifs, specially in the play *Harvest*. The drama presents a dystopian future where human beings are commodities and if they cannot be utilized for the purposes of the rich they are discarded. Body parts of the young and healthy are sold to the rich to keep the latter's bodies functioning while the old and 'useless' are put in hibernation like rubbish being disposed of. Das has chosen this play for his study since this is actually an 'old' play written in 1996 – yet it predicts the post-human technology driven future that has become the present and in its futuristic focus has created something new in the Indian dramatic tradition.

Bidisha Munshi analyses the theme of patriarchy in Mahesh Dattani's play *Where There's a Will*. Hasmukh Mehta, a business tycoon, has died but left his money to a trust controlled by his mistress. The consequences of the will reading reverberates through the lives of the characters as the subject of male control over women and objectification of female sexuality comes up repeatedly and is explored in detail by Munshi. She points out how ultimately Dattani is successful in breaking the hold of patriarchy by creating a bond of affection between the wife and mistress, thus making it a truly feminist play.

Sangeeta Mondal similarly analyses the lives of women under patriarchy in another more famous play by Dattani *Bravely Fought the Queen*. The female characters are all stifled and forced to be silent, because that is how respectable women are expected to be. yet they express their rage and longing in various ways, particularly through singing and dancing and role playing. Mondol, however, focuses on three famous women who are present symbolically in the play. She points out how Naini Devi's Thumri sung in the background is simultaneously a sign of women's

empowerment and their enforced silence by male guardians. Another is the eponymous Rani of Jhansi who though a woman fought like a man. The third is Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, who went to jail resisting the British. Their presence reminds us that women can build up a space for dissent whether approved by patriarchy or not.

Shirshendu Basu on the other hand, instead of concentrating on one play, analyses several early plays of Dattani to understand how power is exercised in the domestic sphere in upper-middle class Indian families. In the three plays he discusses he observes that they are dominated by the presence of a patriarch who shapes the lives of his family members, both male and female, through the power of wealth he wields and social sanction given by a hierarchic society. His corrosive influence continues even after death. Women also try to exercise whatever power they have in their own way to dominate others. However, Basu shows, the plays also demonstrate the possibility of harmony and reconciliation.

Naren Mondal turns his eye on a highly political play, *Duswapner Nagari* which was translated by Utpal Dutta as *Nightmare City*. Produced by Naxalite sympathisers, the play's story unfolds about how the ruling class, the capitalist class, the newspaper owners and the police all collaborate in keeping the common masses downtrodden. None of them care for truth or the people, but pretend they have welfare of the commoners in mind to better establish their control. Dutta points out how the play shows a corrupt cruel society which can be rectified only by overthrowing the machinery of the State. He perceptively comments that the play is relevant because it appears to mirror our contemporary society.

Dr. Swati Roychowdhury's paper attempts to study the global rise of Virtual theatre during the post-Covid era with special emphasis on the reasons behind such emergence, various ways in which Virtual theatres are operating both globally and nationally, and variety of responses such a surfacing has generated, thereby trying to figure out whether such a form of theatre can actually someday act as a proper replacement of the more popular form of live theatre.

From the Editors' Desk

The volume ends with Musarrat Nazmi's paper titled "Twins in Classical Literature and Comics" where she has an intexual reading of comics vis-a-vis Greek classic and Shakespeare.

Happy reading

Amitava Roy, Papia Mitra,
Tapu Biswas and Bryan Reynolds.

Putul Khela: an analysis of transcreation of A Doll's House

Tapu Biswas

“Wherever human beings hold an understanding of themselves as autonomous beings, there is ‘modernity’.” (Wagner 2008;4)

This is the theme that is played out in Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, one of the iconic plays of the modern age. What it did was to strike at the very roots of a social system that had existed for thousands of years: the family unit and a woman’s place. It declared loudly that a marriage is not sacrosanct, that a man’s authority in his household should not go unchallenged, that the prime duty of anyone is to find out who he or she really is and to become that person instead of unquestioningly accepting his/her position in the patriarchal-capitalist metanarrative.

The play begins with the portrait of an ideal middle class family – the couple Torvald and Nora. They are living the middle class dream – moneyed with high social status, affectionate wife and husband duo with children and servants to cater to their needs. They expect still more prosperity and respectability in the future when Torvald will be promoted. Then the stereotypical villain Krogstad turns up to ruin their domestic happiness and good name. It is at this point that the story veers off its expected romantic path. The affectionate husband, who indulges his pretty wife turns out to be an enraged bully while Nora eagerly prepares to sacrifice herself for her husband. When the husband makes it clear that he is more concerned with his respectability than his wife’s agony, the wife suddenly understands the utter negation of her position in the male-governed society. She had behaved exactly as a loving female is supposed to behave – it is now she realises that she is only a doll-wife brought up on a series of ‘life-lies’. Then she revolts. She realises her

husband had never treated her as a serious responsible person, because it is not within the conservative male psyche to do so. Though there seems a possibility of a fairy tale ending at one point it does not materialise. Nora announces that she is going to leave her husband and even the thought of her children cannot budge her - indeed thinking of them makes her realise that she is not emotionally mature enough to take care of them and she must first know herself if she is to be a good mother. She realises that she had not known her husband well enough either. She had borne three children to a stranger. Therefore, she walks out as she will not stay under the roof of a stranger and be dependent on him for anything. As Strindberg was forced to admit (while being very much against female characters like Nora), “thanks to *A Doll’s House*, marriage was revealed as being a far from a divine institution, people stopped regarding it as an automatic provider of absolute bliss, and divorce between incompatible parties came at last to be accepted as conceivably justifiable”. (Meyer 454-55)

But this then-scandalous idea of a woman leaving her husband and children for no reason but to ‘find herself’ is not Ibsen’s only contribution to the play. His special achievement is to make it plausible and real so that everyone who watched it felt that it resonated with their own lives. The theme of marriage is also - as had been the case with past literary works – bound up with money. Both Torvald and Nora regard earning a lot of money as the basis of security, a life free from care. The references to money all lead into the play and culminate in Nora’s famous words, “Torvald, this is a setting of accounts.” The portrait of a marriage based on romantic illusions which disintegrates when the underlying power structure wherein the wife is completely subordinate to the husband with no autonomy of her own becomes naked before the wife and audience alike brings out this subtext. This theme accounts for the fact that a critic like Raymond Williams can describe *A Doll’s House* as more of a social than a literary phenomenon: “The final scene between Nora and Torvald is not so much a discussion as a declaration. It is this in two ways: first, in Nora’s declaration that she will leave Torvald; and secondly, in that it is a stated moral of the play” (48)

The tension of the play is kept up to the end since there seems a possibility of a happy ending. When Krogstad returns Helmer's I.O.U and Torvald is hysterical with relief and joy we feel that perhaps a settlement can be reached. When Torvald becomes again so loving towards Nora we feel perhaps Nora will respond. Even when Nora has gone out Torvald and we, the audience keep hoping that perhaps one day the two will be reconciled. But the slam of the door resounded through Europe and even people not normally interested in art became involved in discussing its ramifications. This is where the art of Ibsen lies in creating Nora—

Habitually and instinctively men pay Ibsen the compliment (so often paid to Shakespeare) of discussing her as though she were a real woman, living a life of her own, quite apart from the poet's creative intelligence. The very critics who begin by railing at her as a puppet end by denouncing her as a woman. She irritates, troubles, fascinates them as no puppet ever could. (William Archer 117)

The play and the concepts it boldly proposed are no longer novel, yet it remains ever-popular because the problems it analysed have not yet been solved completely. The phrase 'women's rights' is not used in *A Doll's House*, but the problem as to what women's rights are is still real enough. The world is still a man's world and if the status of women has been raised, it is still a secondary and an awkward status. In all countries there are still many doll's houses where the wife depends on her husband for economic security and social status. This is echoed in Australian playwright Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. Lawler's title draws significant intertextual resonance from Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. This being a fundamental truth in India as well, it is not surprising that various Indian theatre companies have performed it, adapting to Indian social context to make it more relevant to Indian audiences.

There is a long list of such plays. Utpal Dutta produced *Putuler Sangsar* (tr. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya) in 1951 which made the play known in India. It was followed by Shambhu Mitra's *Putul Khela* in 1958, *Khela Ghar* by Jamini Maitra, *Adhapaker Istri* [*Professor's Wife*] - based on Arthur Henry Jones (1851-1921) adaptation of Ibsen's *A*

Doll's House titled *Breaking a Butterfly* in 1884 by Ashok Rudra, *Nila* [based on Nora, Bergman's adaptation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879),] by Rudra Prasad Sengupta. Another translation by Santi Basu of *A Doll's House* (1952) is also available. There are two Bengali translations of *A Doll's House* from Bangladesh one by Khairul Alam Sabju with the title *Bulu* another by Kamlauddin Nilu with the title *Putuler Itikatha*. There is also a Manipuri translation of this play by the Manipuri theatre personality G.C. Tongba with the title *Lifedebi Amoi Yum* published by Society Theatre, Manipur in September 1966.

Many other managers of theatrical companies took up the challenge through the years — Ebrahim Alkazi, Kumar Roy, Joy Michael, Usha Ganguly, Mohon Maharshi, Shaoli Mitra et. al Even in this contemporary age the play has deep relevance. In 2018, the Hindi adaptation *Gudiya Ghar* by local theatre company “We Can Do it” was performed. In 2019, Tanika Gupta mapped postcolonialism in the drama as well — Nora became Niru and Torvald the British colonialist Tom. In 2020 Biplab Bandopadhyay directed a new version called *Prachyo's Khelaghor*. Even the diaspora got into the act. Bay Area Drama Company, co-sponsored by Center for South Asia, Stanford University plunged into the critical discussions of marriage in an Indian-American setting. According to their advertisement:

This adaptation of “A Doll's House”, written and directed by Basab Pradhan, retells Ibsen's classic by exploring gender stereotypes within a seemingly perfect Indian marriage in the Bay Area. What is the status of a capable and educated woman in a household where she has chosen to be the homemaker? Is she truly an equal? Does a woman's role as a mother and a wife preclude her own identity as an individual?

(<https://www.bayareadrama.company/a-dolls-house> accessed 01.05.2022)

However, one can say that the play really took India by storm when *Putul Khela* was first performed by Bohurupee theatre group in 1958 under the direction of Shombhu Mitra. When the play was staged Indian society was undergoing massive upheavals — newly independent, ill-at-

ease with its colonial legacy, traditional gender roles reeling under the impact of modernity. This was particularly noticeable in Bengal. In the 1950, Kolkata's cultural and literary prominence was at its zenith as playwrights like Bijon Bhattacharya, Badal Sircar and Buddhadeva Bose were actively contributing to the literary production and theatrical performance of many Bengali dramas and Bengali adaptations of foreign dramas in several popular theatres across West Bengal. Shombhu Mitra was deeply aware of the cosmopolitan nature of the contemporary educated middle-class Bengali society and realised that the play would be more acceptable now and give the cosmopolitan zeitgeist of the 1950s a new impetus.

The play destabilised the concept of traditional Indian marriages: Bulu-Nora (acted by Tripti Mitra) displayed intellectual and moral faculty of her own which resulted in her going out of the home on the mission of comprehending her own self, instead of being a good wife and mother. This paper will focus on how Nora as Bulu fared in this Indian adaptation and what changes made it specifically Indian and of Bengal than of the cold mountains of Norway. It must be remembered that if a play is to be successful, it cannot be a mere word by word translation, but a transcreation. That is evident in the language Mitra uses which is simple and colloquial Bengali and thus understandable to people from all walks of life.

The problem of translating it into Bengali not only lay in the fact that Sombhu Mitra did not know Norwegian, the original language of the play and therefore had to rely on its English translation, but also in the cultural, economic and political differences that existed and still exist between Norwegian and Bengali culture. Also, the time barrier posed a considerable challenge to Mitra's task of adaptation; *A Doll's House* was first published in 1879 and Mitra was translating it after more than 80 years and thereby, he was supposed to come to terms with the sweeping socio-cultural transitions that had already taken place in the global scenario. In the notes of the translation/ transcreation Sombhu Mitra wrote under the title "Putul Khela" published by Satyabrata Library in 1968:

This drama is a translation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Being painfully aware of my limitations, I couldn't have taken up this endeavor for academic purposes only. However, the paucity of good dramas together with the need to stage certain world-renowned plays in Bengal have necessitated my taking up this project. Hence, this translation is not a disconnected effort on my part, and is, in fact, an integral component of the series of outstanding plays by Ibsen that I have been involved with. This realization has therefore become an incentive behind this effort. For the purpose of universalizing the characters and dialogues in Ibsen's play and making them more relatable to the contemporary audience, not only have I localized the names of the characters, but also replaced Christmas with puja, and substituted dancing with recitation. I have taken such liberties with the intention to avoid the sheer absurdity of an Indo-European rendition of actors communicating in Bengali, whilst maintaining all the appearance and accoutrements of a foreign culture.

However, it is not my intention to attest that an Indianisation of all non-native dramas be made. Such a choice depends entirely on the experiences of the translator and it is based on such understandings that I have attempted to recast this play. On account of the limits imposed by time, I have had to cut out certain sections of the drama. Nonetheless, the duration of Ibsen's play has exceeded the standard span of a stage performance by a little over 30 minutes. Besides, the amount of time and words an author had to spend in conveying his message 80 years back, is in no way similar or even necessary in today's day. However, the sheer genius of the dramatist together with his extraordinary capacity to knit together the subtle threads of his narrative, has made it practically impossible to strike out any segment of his work. Consequently, discounting the preferences of the audience towards a two to two and a half hours play, "Putul Khela" was performed for more than three hours.¹

To make the adaptation successful in the context of the contemporary social history and culture of Bengal, Mitra also had to keep in mind the economic and cultural environment in which his characters live. To do so, he makes some important references to the quintessential Bengali culture of that time, be it the festival of Durga Puja or Bulu's act of

reciting famous songs of Rabindranath Tagore from ‘Jhulan’ (Swing) taken from *Sonar Tari* which begins with the ominous line:

আমি পরানের সাথে খেলিব আজিকে মরণের খেলা।
নিশীথবেলা।
সঘন বরষা, গগন আঁধার,
হেরো বারিধারে কাঁদে চারিধার,
ভীষণ রঙ্গে ভবতরঙ্গে ভাসাই ভেলা...
আমি পারছি না, আমি পারছি না, সব গোলমাল
হয়ে যাচ্ছে।

Today I shall make mirth with my own heart.

Today, tonight,

Past the hours of darkness.

Behold the thickness of the rains, the deep dimness of the skies.

With frenzied fanfare I set off on my raft, I ride the waves of the world.

I cannot...I never can ... I am in helpless turmoil

(Self Translation)

Consequently, he also had to replace the European festival of Christmas and typical costume and dance party associated with it (as shown in the play) with Durga Puja and Vijaya Dashami function. With these changes being incorporated into the ideological spectrum of the drama, Mitra makes a satisfactory attempt at positing the play within the cultural and social backdrop of modern Kolkata and at the same time, also manages to remain faithful to the main storyline by keeping intact the Aristotelian concept of unity of time, place and action.

The language / words he uses are the same as is generally used by the members of a typical Bengali household in their everyday life. Like ‘spendthrift’..., ‘singing lark becomes ‘bulbuli’, a singing bird found in Bengal since lark was not a species native to India; ..., “Damn it all”...,

“silly Nora” ..., ‘Thou ...etc are some examples. But the word ‘stranger’ has been translated as ..., I think ‘...’ may be a better and common word here. (do it yourself)

In order to prevent the play from appearing a simulated version of the actual drama, he rejects certain theatricalities used by Ibsen and the youthful exuberance shown by Nora, which might fit into the original narrative of *A Doll's House*, but will obviously lack spontaneity and authenticity if translated verbatim into Bengali. This, in turn, inevitably diminishes the dramatic effect of the play to a certain extent, but also allows it to stay relevant and relatable for Mitra's Bengali audience. Here, it is worth noting that he strictly sticks to the colloquial Bengali expressions of everyday life to avoid any unnecessary linguistic encumbrances at the time of the theatrical performance of the play. Therefore, *Putul Khela* can be perceived as a successful Bengali adaptation of *A Doll's House*, but before providing this claim a strong ground, one has to extricate the process through which Sombhu Mitra retains the multi-dimensionality of the main characters along with representing the ethical and moral dilemmas irrevocably entwined with their seemingly happy and peaceful family life, which Ibsen's play poses to its readers and audience, and thus compelling them to acknowledge the corruptions, hypocrisies, and lacunas within many social institutions like law, marriage and family, that conjointly serve to render a woman, especially a housewife, a mere plaything — “a doll” in the hands of her husband and her father.

To start off, I would like to focus on how Sombhu Mitra recreates or reorganizes the social functions of the original drama within a typical Bengali setting. The main challenge for Mitra was to maintain the primary functions of the characters in complete obedience to the actual drama and at the same time, to take the required liberty of projecting the characters within the Bengali context. A nineteenth century Norwegian middle-class house wife (Nora) and her twentieth century post-colonial counterpart (বুলু / Bulu), though in their stifling obligations to the familial, social and cultural pressures and constraints both belonging to the oppressed category of “women”, are definitely not on the same page when the question of varying social and cultural customs, mannerisms, and ideologies comes into play. Just like Nora, Bulu is also shown as

being infantilized and dehumanised by her husband (here তপন / Tapan), who uses many endearing animal names (বুলবুলি /Bulbuli, কাঠবেড়ালি / Kathberali etc.) to address her and express his obsessive attachment with her. Despite getting constantly trivialised in this way, both Nora and Bulu live rather self-complacently with complete moral and economic dependence on their husbands. Save these similarities, the fact remains that the language barrier has hindered Mitra from fully realizing the potential of the characters in the adapted version. But to his advantage, he instrumentalized what is unique to his mother tongue Bengali : the politics of naming.

Kristine becomes “Krishna”; Torvald becomes “Tapan” and Nora becomes “Bulu”. By using such common Bengali names, Mitra further consolidates the cultural authenticity of his adaptation; his audience would see a reflection of their own lives in the unfolding of the story of the drama. The name of the antagonist of the play — “কেষ্টপদ /Keshstopada (in the original drama, “Krogstad”) also has some subtle implications; “Keshto...” is a very usual name one can identify with Bengali “para culture”, where the name “Keshto” is often associated with someone who is a rogue and has fallen into moral deprivation. Moreover, the term is a derivative of “Krishna”, the name of his ex-lover with whom he reunites once again at the end of the play. The tone of the name “Keshto” is on a par with the domineering attitude of the antagonist’s character. He also finds the appropriate Bengali terms for the endearing but also dehumanizing words Torvald uses for addressing Nora (“my little songbird” becomes আমার বুলবুলি /’amar bulbuli”).

The other aspect of *Putul Khela* which makes it a successful adaptation is its capability of showing the complex social situations and dramatic subtleties with great erudition. In *A Doll’s House*, Nora is first delineated as an ordinary, playful, free-spirited housewife, happily oblivious to her seemingly harmonious but fragile relationship with her husband Torvald. Bulu, in *Putul Khela*, is painted in the same light but with much more restraint. Unlike Nora, she does not get carried away by the economic stability she enjoys and the prospect of her husband’s promotion to the position of a bank manager; she is the typical middle-class Bengali

housewife who constantly and desperately endeavours to hide her overwhelming vulnerability, as she strives to portray herself as a happy and satisfied woman who carries a perfect balance between her private life and family life. But behind this veil of the “happy woman” lies a deeply insecure soul who, being unable to cope with the turn of events, finds herself at the mercy of her creditor Keshtopada. It is only in the final act of the play that she is able to transcend her dual identity (identity of a cheerful, satisfied, docile housewife and identity of the “saviour” of the family) as she tears herself out of her husband’s overburdening care and suffocating control over her body and mind.

The name of the play is also very significant in this case. “Putul Khela” does not mean “doll’s house”; rather it means “puppetry”, that is, making lifeless puppets perform at the director’s will. A focuses more on how Bulu’s husband controls and manipulates her like a doll and thus making her entire married life “a game of puppets.”

Mitra’s title, (*Putul Khela*) which is literally “Puppet Play” or “Doll’s Play” speaks more when it is translated as “Playing with Dolls” because in Mitra’s perception the human beings trapped in a corrupt and degenerated society inevitably act like dolls. The title also expresses Mitra’s disregard for the institution of marriage which, as he sees it, is based on lies and deceptions. The institution asks men and women to act like puppets and that is what the humans have been doing for ages. (Ahsanuzzaman 522)

Mitra draws a parallel between the game of puppets and running a household and explores the intricacies involved in a domestic relationship. Tapan, however anxiously careful and cautious he might seem about Bulu, proves himself to be an egotistical, self-centric person, when being overwhelmed by a paroxysm of anger and despair, he attacks her in the meanest terms and puts all blame on her for his own undoing. ডঃ রায় / Dr. Roy (Dr. Rank in the original drama) is also a very symbolic character, throwing some disconcerting but unavoidable questions at the audience about the true meaning of love, the difference between love and companionship, and a caretaker and a husband. Keshtopada as in the original play is not entirely a villainous character either. He, too, shows

his goodwill by sending back the bond to Bulu and offering apologies for his malevolence and blackmailing. This way, Mitra succeeds in maintaining the multi-dimensionality of the characters in the Bengali adaptation.

Christmas and New Year are two very significant symbols in the actual drama; Mitra replaces them with Durga Puja and Vijaya Dashami. While in European culture and tradition, Christmas is a special occasion to bring family members together, and the impending New Year gestures towards the renewal of life and hope, Durga Puja, in Bengali culture, represents women empowerment and revival of hope and optimism with Maa Durga exterminating the evil forces by Her auspicious power. The replacement of one festival with another allows a subtle difference to creep in. Nora's act of going away from her family and husband and embracing a new lifestyle is diametrically opposite of what Christmas is supposed to do — to strengthen the bond between family members. In *Putul Khela*, Bulu's departure from the family coincides with the festival of Vijaya Dashami. On Vijaya Dashami (the last day of Durga Puja), Goddess Durga is believed to depart from her earthly abode, leaving behind her innumerable devotees on earth. The festival is one of leave taking and that is what Bulu does. This festival invokes a general atmosphere of sadness and gloom, but at the same time, it reinforces the hope that Maa Durga will come back once again next year. Bulu's triumphant outburst against her husband Tapan and the control mechanism he has adopted to fully subjugate her to his whims and caprices, reminds Mitra's Bengali audience of Maa Durga's victory against the evil forces embodied by "Mahishasur." Bulu's quest for a self-identity by freeing herself from the shackles of a viciously patriarchal household and a toxic relationship serves as a larger analogy to what Durga Puja primarily epitomizes — the resurgence and victory of Mother Power over the dark, inhibiting forces of the universe. Again as with the original play there is hope that Bulu will return if Tapan changes, just as Durga returns every year to make the world a better place. This way, just like Ibsen uses the metaphors of Christmas and New Year to produce a pervasive dramatic irony and to invigorate the dramatic appeal of the play, Mitra similarly exploits Durga Puja, one of the greatest festivals of Bengal to accentuate the main theme of the play — female empowerment and disintegration of the patriarchal system against a resolute and confident woman, namely, Bulu.

Select Production Report of this Bengali version:

This adapted version of Putul *Khela* was first performed by Bohurupee theatre group in Kolkata on 12th January under the direction of Shombhu Mitra at Mahajati Sadan. With him were Khaled Chowdhury as stage designer, Tapas Sen as lighting expert. The different roles were performed as Hemanto – Tamal Lahiri, Mute – Bali Gupta, Bulu – Tripti Mitra, Tapan Sombhu Mitra, Dr Roy – Kumar Roy, Krishna – Arati Maitra, Keshtopada – Amar Ganguly, Rantu – Chanchal Sarkar, Rina – Pragya Maitra, Aai – Kanak Roy. It will be relevant to note here that seven years earlier in 1951, Calcutta Little Theatre group staged *A Dolls House* in 1951 with the title *Putuler Sangsar* under the direction of Utpal Dutt. Reviewing Mitra's performance one of the important newspaper *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, January 24, 1958 wrote:

... on the second day, Shombhu Mitra's Bohurupee presented a new play –*Putul Khela* before a packed house. The play was adapted from Ibsen's famous drama *A Doll's House*. The one and inimitable Nora of *A Doll's House* was Bulu in *Putul Khela* a difficult character portrayed with astonishing charm, vigour and conviction by Tripti Mitra. The teamwork of Putul Khela with Tripti Mitra and Shombhu in the lead, was a treat to watch. [quoted from Proceedings International Ibsen Conference, Dhaka Bangladesh 8-14 November 2022 p 211.]

This version of Mitra was performed in Ranchi on invitation by Tagore society. Reviewing the performance another theatre critic in the "*The New Republic*" of June 1959 wrote:

Bohurupee is a familiar and meaningful name today to all lovers of the Indians Theatre and Bengali stage... On the second day the group presented two performances of "Putul Khela" – Shombhu Mitra's own adaptation of the famous Ibsen play, *A Doll's House*... Shombhu Mitra's adaptation of Ibsen's masterpiece, however, carries a touch of genius and passes the test with flying colours. The drama and suspense of the original lose none of their poignancy and vigour in the adaptation whose characters are as living as in the original if a comparison is to be made, Mitra's Bulu is a more plausible character, at least to the Indian mind, than Ibsen's Nora

and an Indian audience would see in Bulu a character that is perfectly plausible in the Indian context and can easily evoke audience's sympathy... Tripti Mitra is today the best character actress of the Indian stage. In *Putul Khela* she interpreted the character of Bulu with rare understanding, sympathy and superb skill, Shombhu Mitra himself lived up to his reputation and there was excellent team work in which the play got adequate support from all members...

Putul Khela by Shombhu Mitra was also performed in Nagpur in 1964. Reviewing the performance one drama critic wrote in Hitavada Nagpur:

... The lover of stage in Nagpur had an opportunity of seeing Shombhu Mitra's *Putul Khela* presented by his Bohurupee artists last night at Dhanwate Rang Mandir and even those who did not understand Bengali language were struck by the performance given by Shombhu Mitra and his wife Tripti Mitra.

After forty four years of first performance of *Putul Khela* by Shambhu Mitra and Tripti Mitra this version was once performed in Kolkata on 19th, 24th and 26th May 2002 by the theatre group Pancham Vaidic with the direction of their daughter Saoli Mitra. In this production Saoli Mitra played the role of Bulu, the role played by Tripti Mitra in earlier productions. This performance has been reviewed in the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* dated 20.05.2002, *The Telegraph* dated 18th May 2002 and 25.05.2002, *The Sananda* 1st August 2002 etc. Reviewing the performance one drama critic wrote in *The Telegraph* dated 25th May 2002 under the caption "Action replay after decades":

.... Saoli Mitra, in a tribute to her parents, staged *Putul Khela* in a tiny auditorium at the Rishi Aurobindo Institute of Culture in Ranikhuti last Sunday. Mitra who also directed the play, admits she closely followed her father's adaptation. So there was bound to be a sense of *déjà vu*.

The set with minor variations, was a replica of the one created by Khaled Choudhury for the 50s production. It was meant to be a room that reflected the good taste of its occupants. Hence the applied curtains, terracotta gewgaws and winnowing fan used for nuptial rituals that were all the range in those days.

Saoli Mitra's Bulu is a much more restrained and controlled version of her mother's portrayal, particularly in the last scene where she

shows no trace of emotion as she unflinchingly confronts the truth about self, her marriage and her spouse. She acts with dignity as she explains to her husband why they should part ways....

To sum up, it may be pointed out that there are many reviews of these performances. All the reviewers have praised Mitra's direction and performance.

- (1) Extract from Brochure of *Putul Khela* performance (1958) published by Satyabrata Library. Translated into English by Tapu Biswas.

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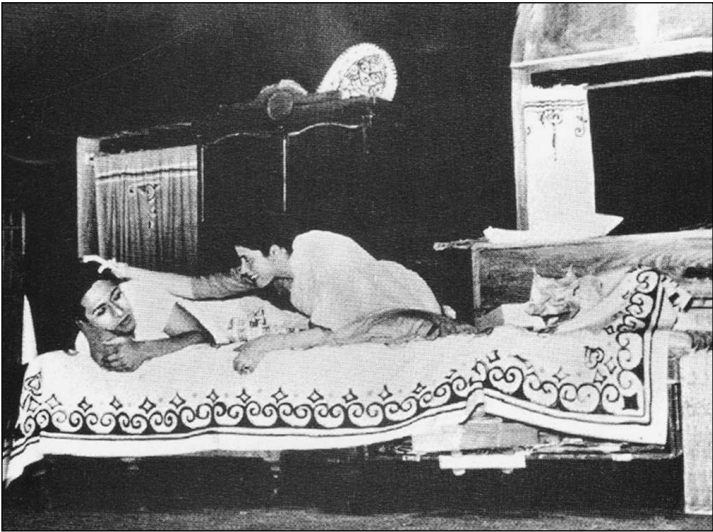


Scenes from *Putul Khela* directed by Shombhu Mitra



পুতুল খেলা (১৯৫৮)

বুলু : তৃপ্তি মিত্র, ডা. রায় : কুমার রায়



পুতুল খেলা (১৯৫৮)

তপন : শম্ভু মিত্র, বুলু : তৃপ্তি মিত্র

Doubling the Act: A Look at *Frankenstein* on Stage

Asmita Boral

To each ego, its object, to each superego, its abject.

—Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*

This essay is a look at National Theatre's 2011 twin productions of *Frankenstein*¹, directed by Danny Boyle, which I chanced upon on *Youtube* last year, made available to viewers for a limited period as worldwide 'lockdown' ensued. Its singular distinction is that there are two versions of it, with stellar performers Benedict Cumberbatch and Johnny Lee Miller alternating between the roles of Victor Frankenstein and his creature. Besides being a play adapted from a bicentennial novel, there are several factors that contributed to it being a runaway hit. Here I shall be looking at some ways in which it has radicalized contemporary theatre. Within the brief ambit of this essay, I am also dipping into how, as theatre, it has redeemed the novel from a pit of corruptive adaptations and thrown new light on it.

Key words: monster, horror, grotesque, abjection

"A creature is something who is created; a monster is a freak of nature." This is how Nick Dear, the writer of the play *Frankenstein*, adapted from Mary Shelley's 1818 novel, clarifies the terms². The general view of Frankenstein's creature has been that of a monster fueled by more than a century of film adaptations that have made a bleak, binary portrayal of the novel's characters, and indeed, the two words have almost been used interchangeably. Since Early Modern times, the word 'monster' has meant any being that was 'unnatural', irrespective of its girth or features. The twin productions staged on alternate nights reinstate Frankenstein's creature and effectively raise the Biblical questions that Mary Shelley set out asking in her pathbreaking novel, before her creation

got shrouded in grotesque distortions. A century of adaptations, the oldest perhaps being the 1910 silent film of Thomas Edison's company³, has demonized Frankenstein's creature into such a monolithic Golem⁴ that the National Theatre play undertakes to cleave the creator and the created to raise some pertinent doubts. The sutured faces of the two actors on two sides of the poster of the twin productions, fit as halves of a single whole face. Thus, despite the obvious alterity of the characters of the creator and the created, Boyle and Dear present the creature as an integrated whole, and as an inalienable part of his creator, whose abjection cannot be justified. In fact, as director Danny Boyle clearly states, what he tried to do by getting the actors to swap roles was to drive home this fusion between the creator and his creature⁵, the fact that they belonged together, that one was no more a monster than the other, rather than play each other's alters. The moral consciousness of the play has been subverted in favour of the creature, unlike most adaptations, and indeed, as Cumberbatch asserts, both the productions are "creature-centric"⁶, and even though the actors swap roles and subjectivities, the vantage point of the play does not change.

Previous adaptations, mostly on film, did not preclude alterity altogether. Even as early a production as Edison's 1910 film,⁷ a 13 minute silent slideshow of sorts, which clearly brands Frankenstein's creature as an 'evil monster', does mention that it is the subconscious 'evil' in Victor Frankenstein himself, that created this monster. This alterity is implied in a Dorian Gray-moment when Victor looks at a mirror and finds, to his horror, not his own reflection, but an image of the creature, who has a hideous appearance. Most film productions have portrayed Victor Frankenstein as a cross between a scientist and an alchemist cum black magician; in fact, the sets depicting his laboratory have been some of the most intricate and elaborate ones. Victor as the Promethean smith forging out a human mass from the chaotic dead matter has been the clinching scene for most of the film adaptations. The 1994 adaptation directed by Kenneth Branagh⁸ with himself playing Victor Frankenstein blends a Renaissance fascination with the male form with the Enlightenment wonder of machines, the camera dwelling rather lovingly on Branagh's rippling muscles so as to heighten the failure of his creation all the more, a

subhuman form intent on murder and possibly, cannibalism. The sexually charged male figure denied his own sexual partner makes for a menacing spectre, particularly so for Elizabeth Lavenza, portrayed always as a delicate beauty even when played by actors such as Helena Bonham Carter⁹. This archetypal fear of the monster preying upon or violating the frail white damsel is another motif that fires up the popular imagination, and has unmistakably featured in every adaptation. Elizabeth's murder and/or ravishment is often the climactic scene in the sordid sagas of *Frankenstein* on film, raking up primal, racist, colonialist prejudices with the Caliban-Miranda¹⁰ equation woven into these fears. Elizabeth Lavenza in Boyle's *Frankenstein* is no frail beauty, nor is she white. Naomi Harris, a black actor, plays her and she is far more vocal and critical of Victor than she ever is in the letters (that is all the voice she gets in Shelley's epistolary novel). She is no Penelope waiting patiently for Victor's return, but questions his long absence, derelictions of duty, and intentions toward her quite sharply. Dear and Boyle rue in an interview with Richard Frayling that there was no feminist twist they could give the play¹¹, as Shelley's Elizabeth Lavenza was quite a flat character, and despite her parentage, Mary Shelley just did not write her book with such concerns. However, the play's other departure, indeed retrieval, from 'monstrosity', is the Female Creature: the 'Eve' that is imagined but never realized. Depicted as mute but beautiful despite her equally sutured look, she is incomplete in the sense that she does not belong to the symbolic realm, but is not unformed. Her movements have the grace of a ballet dancer (the female creature is played by Andrea Padurariu), in stark contrast to the unsure gait of the creature, and she holds his fall, supporting him from behind. She is desired: she possesses none of the lapses, none of the lacks the creature experiences. She is all that he is not: graceful, beautiful, possibly acceptable in human society. True to Shelley's text, 'Eve' never comes into being in the play either, but is an hallucination, disappearing into an upright coffin once the bleak reality of the creature takes over. The psychedelic scenes from Danny Boyle's cult film *Trainspotting*¹² come to mind here. Eve is also an embodiment of art, of romantic imagination, something that industrialization has come to threaten in *Frankenstein*'s time. A surreal dance sequence with 'Eve'

getting animated and de-animated, bursting into life and receding, crushing all the creature's hopes of belonging and further rendering him abject, is another climactic point in the play. It also conveys through dance, through bodily rhythms, a harmony that would have taken many minutes of dialogue. Interestingly enough, the only person who actually engages bodily with the creature is an ample-bosomed prostitute, suggestive of maternal nourishment, who, far from recoiling, woos him, and in a stray liberty from the original text, possibly introduces him to sexual intercourse. This, too, is poetically portrayed through dance moves following close upon the heels of the steam engine sequence, juxtaposing the mechanization of feelings and reassertion of life's rhythms and instincts in the face of an unfeeling, faceless world.

Frankenstein's innumerable adaptations, have nevertheless frozen Shelley's characters into such binaries that extracting the core idea of the novel from the consciousness of a viewing public trapped in an age of mechanical reproduction as it were, reduced to mere viewers and critics rather than emotional participants in a theatrical production with live performers, is in itself a Herculean task. As both the director Danny Boyle, with a formidable oeuvre of films behind him (*Trainspotting*, *Slumdog Millionaire*, et al) and the playwright Nick Dear agree, theatre does things that are way beyond the scope of a static medium as film, and evolves "like a living organism every night."¹³¹³ Doubling: Frankenstein and the Creature.

The presence of a live audience makes a more compelling demand on an actor's abilities, and creates a dynamic chemistry between the actor and his audiences every time he is on stage. Without the screen of a camera or an inanimate eye, the actor is a bare forked animal, clothed only with his acting prowess, and there are no retakes. The play also challenges the subtle distinction between *theatre* and performance as theatre presumes the presence of spectators, has scopic dimension and is actually an interface, while performance can take place even without the presence of spectators.¹⁴ Certain acts and functions might be so private that the spectator might actually be turned into a voyeur or feel like one, for one's very eyes act as the camera. That is sometimes the feeling one might get from certain scenes of this production, especially

when the creature is coming into his own, struggling for expression, or trying to figure out what is food. Generically speaking, the play approaches more what Antonin Artaud touted as Theatre of Cruelty¹⁵ than Modern theatre of the second half of the 20th century, that Kristeva claims has no ‘place’ for the bodily or the semiotic, and therefore ‘does not take (a) place’¹⁶, but has rather collapsed into merely verbal exchange, functioning only on the plane of the symbolic. National theatre’s productions seems to challenge Kristeva’s claim and by including music, dance, ritualistic movements, reinstates theatre into a more semiotic realm than the mere symbolic which she rues has come to rule modern theatre. It also conforms somewhat to what Artaud argues for theatre, to jolt the audience out of their complacency and for them to have a more active engagement to what is going on onstage, for theatre to shock and cause sensations at the instinctual level, for theatre to inflict trauma, as it were. The engagement of the body, the semiotic, lends credence to the creature’s coming into existence and discovering the world on his own, without anybody to hold his hand and introduce him to the symbolic codes. The post-Enlightenment empiricism that threatened to pervade life and change the very ethos of society to a utilitarian one, powered by the Industrial Revolution, is depicted by an almost surreal sequence with a musical performance by the band Underground. This is a validation of modern theatre that Kristeva had hoped for: it involves music, dance and ritual; things happen more on the semiotic plane than the merely symbolic.¹⁷ Boyle, who returned to theatre after almost a gap of fifteen years, admits that till very recently, there had been very little ‘illustrative music’ used in theatre. He deliberately chose to work with a radical band such as Underground for this scene, bringing to mind again, Artaud’s technique. The moves of the performers on the steam engine-like machine that zooms onto stage do have a repetitive, ritualistic bent as they enact machinery, overwhelming the creature and jarring upon his senses that nature has soothed. They also remind the audience of the ever-increasing mechanization of life in a very brutal, disruptive fashion.

The astute lighting on stage designed by Bruce Poet heightens the sense of desolation, estrangement, just it stresses moments of ecstasy, pure sensuous joy in being, existing. A huge ceiling of a thousand lights

overhangs the stage, roofing the entire auditorium, as it were for a massive impact, and illuminates it sensitively, as when the creature realizes the sense-perceptions, and takes child-like pleasure in them, or sensuously makes his acquaintance with nature. It effectively contrasts the shadowy life ruled by machines and the illuminated life of bare sense perceptions. When all the lights come on, Boyle mentions the effect he intends is that of 'Let there be light!' with all the weight of its Biblical connotation and the European Enlightenment, with also the understanding that humankind no longer needed a god to light up darkness or needed to thank every the morning.¹⁸ The full impact of these words are brought on by the discovery of electricity and the thousand experiments around electricity and galvanism that were being conducted at the time when Shelley was writing the novel, and electricity revolutionizing human civilization possibly as much as the mythical Prometheus' 'stealing' of fire. Electricity as animating, as life-restoring, or resurrecting, as dispelling doubts and darkness, is amply suggested in Shelley's novel; in fact, one of the Eureka moments in the adolescent Victor's life that kindled his ambition was the discovery of the power of electricity as lightning struck down and devastated a tree. But the interesting twist is that Boyle and Dear's creature does not come alive or get animated through electricity; it is definitely not a mechanical production, but there is suggestion of biological emergence as it breaks into existence through raw pain, the body arching as in the sculpture of Laokoon.¹⁹

The post-Enlightenment empiricism that threatened to pervade life and change the very ethos of society to a utilitarian one, powered by the Industrial Revolution is depicted by an almost surreal sequence with a musical performance by the band Underground, who are riding and driving this immense engine, ushering in the revolution in an almost jarring, jolting manner soon after the creature has made his acquaintance with nature, and rolled and reveled in its sensuous feel. This is one of the ways in which modern theatre on the western stage has been radicalized: by involving fantasy, music, dance and ritual it is in a way harking back to more ancient forms of theatre, albeit in a modern avatar, something theatre in India has been doing for some decades steered by playwrights such as Girish Karnad in his *Hayavadana* (1971) and

Nagamandala (1988) that incorporated Kannada folk theatre form *Yakshagana*. The moves of the performers on the engine-like machine that zooms onto stage are machine-like, cancelling out the senses, their eyes covered in dark eye patches, and their ears deaf to noise (indeed there is the sound effect of factory sirens and sinister music of approaching doom, as it were); they move the cogs on the machine's giant wheels and do not commune with one another, but attack the creature as a mob, blind to sensing or understanding him signaling his rejection from the industrialised society, as well. This single sequence conveys the isolation and disjunction brought on by mechanization.

The twin productions provide ample scope for physicality: from the stretching and arching of a new born to his first unsure steps, his furtive sense of himself as a forbidden being, his aggression and agility, his frustration, anger and perplexity, the role demands immense physical fitness and flexibility from its actors. Performatively, Frankenstein's creature, now stripped of the accoutrements of mask (as in the 1910 production), hideous make up (1931 production and some later ones), grotesque form achieved through special effects (more recent productions as that of 1994 or 2020), that leave little scope for acting in the film versions, presents several challenges. In a way, it meant a 'de-monstration', to borrow Kristeva's term and usurp it to a different context,²⁰ entering into a semiotic realm mostly abandoned in preference to the symbolic, the plane of verbal language. In an interview, Cumberbatch and Miller talk about 're-educating' their bodies, packing the behavior of a new born or a toddler into a 30 year old form, and therefore un-learning body behavioral patterns. To prepare, Cumberbatch says he has visited and observed people who have had to re-educate their bodies: patients of surgery, stroke victims, survivors of car crashes and war.²¹ So in a sense, it entailed approaching the play with an untutored body, unlearning the 'body techniques' acquired and internalised over years. As such there was to be no inhibitions, no sense of shame, no sense of decency or conscience, in every way 'pre-lapsarian', and pre-moral. Boyle and Dear's creature is to always stand outside the purview of morality, the play implies, because he never got inducted into society in the first place, and was rather left in the lurch. Dear and Boyle's creature, as Boyle specifies

in an interview,²² looks rather as someone who has just come out of surgery. There is a certain uncanniness attached to the creature's movements, it seeming to familiarize itself with limbs and movements, the 'techniques of the body', to borrow Marcel Mauss' term, that should have been familiar to a thirty year old, but is not. Therein lies the grotesqueness of the situation, not so much in the appearance of the creature. The jerky, halting, faltering, spasmodic movements, do not belong to a thirty year old frame. As the creature struggles to find a form as it were, flapping as a fish out of water, evoke a sense of incongruity that have nothing to do with deviation from 'nature' or monstrosity, but scream out for nurture. At this point, the play engages in the semiotic realm, with the body as the communicating medium rather than verbal language, because the creature is himself yet to enter the symbolic plane. There is a half comical, half poignant, touch to the character and that still does not fit the definition of the 'grotesque' as presented in the carnivalesque mode. It is useful here to consider the creature 'grotesque' in the sense Wolfgang Kayser used the word to interpret Renaissance styles and designs:

...not only something playfully gay and carelessly fantastic, but also something ominous and sinister in the face of a world totally different from the familiar one: a world in which the realm of inanimate things is no longer separated from those of plants, animals and human beings and where the laws of statics, symmetry and proportion are no longer valid....this term also names the sphere in which the dissolution of reality and the participation in a different kind of existence...form an experience about the nature and significance of which man has never ceased to ponder."²³

Far from being an animated patchwork of discrete matter, the creature here rather presents a syncretic form come alive, one no less human than one biologically born. Boyle particularly makes it clear that they (Dear and he) did not want to make their creature appear comically gruesome with disparate limbs stitched together, but rather as formed from within, one internally built together and a whole body come alive²⁴. In a way, Boyle rejected the 'grotesque' look. Thus they lend an integrity to the creature's body that reinterprets Shelley's novel and introduces it to a new discourse. There is no smithy, there is no furnace, no awe-inspiring

laboratory with intimidating machines churning human organs in some cauldron and welding out the creature. Rather there is a dome shaped sheath, as if at the mouth of a giant womb, which ruptures as the creature rolls out of it. As light pours onto the stage through a chink in the membrane, the area around the creature dark besides, the sense of its solitude gets heightened. There is a dream-like quality to it, as if the birth is taking place in a void, in an abyss, as if nothing exists but the creature. Once Victor beholds him, there is horror, rejection, abandonment. He is bereft of all the appendages of a human birth: a mother, a family, society, sustenance, support. On stage the creature is no larger-than-life creature, rather he is a vulnerable being, dwarfed by the presence of the enormous dome-like structure from which its struggles to come through. While Cumberbatch and Miller are well-built, they are trim. So the creature is, in both productions, of human scale. The frailty and vulnerability of a fully formed man yet uninitiated into the human world strikes an immediate chord of sympathy with the audience. Boyle takes care to steer clear from the common perceptions of the creature, for he is well aware that there would be many in the audience who would not have read Shelley's novel, but who might have watched a film adaptation or two. So there would be an anticipation of a 'monster', a demoniac being, confronted with a vulnerable creature, struggling to come into existence. Hence, the director's spotlight on the 'birth' of Frankenstein's creature, reworking his genesis, and directly aiming for the audience's sympathy as for a newborn. In an interview Cumberbatch talks of the 'endearing' quality of the 'man-child' whom it is a pleasure to watch evolve and come into his own,²⁵ acquiring for him a vulnerability that effectively provides a shield against perceiving him as a villain. Interestingly, the dome shaped structure, an archetypal symbol of the womb, reminds us how Frankenstein's creature owes no debt to the female uterus in Shelley's novel, emerging Athene-like from the father Victor Frankenstein, queering him in a way, but also holding him solely responsible for the creature, and accountable for his actions, too. In fact, the production evokes the lack of the mother almost in every step the creature takes. All through the play, the creature played by both Cumberbatch and Miller looks like he has recently experienced trauma: the trauma of birth, and of coming

into human existence. In a way, they vicariously experience labour pains, as they take birth, usurping the maternal function, as it were. In this production, however, Victor does not get much credence as father either, having abandoned his child at the very outset. Dear and Boyle talk about the crucial lack of parenting in the creature's case, and viewed from his point of view, despite the devastation he wreaks throughout the play, the creature retains audience's sympathy.²⁶

What the actors effectively perform is abjection, and yet they have attracted, rather than repelled, large audiences. The creature is what cannot be owned, cannot be acknowledged, what is expelled out. The horror inspired by Frankenstein's creature is the horror of abjection, unrelated to his appearance here. Shunned and repelled from the moment of his birth, the creature experiences utter abjection. It is important to remember that the novel has Victor Frankenstein scavenging through dead remains, charnel houses, graveyards and morgues, gathering raw material for his ambitious experiment, matter generally regarded as defiling, impure and Victor's rejection of his creature could be caused by a late revulsion, caused by postponement of his initial feelings of horror and repulsion transposed onto the creature rather than evoked by the very appearance of the creature. In her *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva delineates the 'abject' as ultimately threatening, ultimately powerful, drawing its power from its very ambiguity, its un-belonging.²⁷ Since the creature is never claimed, never owned, he is never inducted into the society ruled by moral and behavioural codes. Hence he feels no compulsion to abide by such rules; he exists *outside*. The scene of Cumberbatch's creature grabbing at grass and whatever he can lay his hands on is poignant: utterly abandoned, he has not even been introduced to food by his absent parent, and has to figure out what sustains human life. The sensuous ecstasy of experiencing rain and the earth is offset by the raw pain of hunger. When he comes upon the old blind man's cottage in the woods, the surrogate father to the 'boy' (a vital detail and a character omitted from most adaptations, one that humanizes him and lends him subjectivity), he learns about relationships, about the world and how it functions, and philosophy. He also realizes that he is a being who does not need to hide or cower or lead a forbidden existence and who

can exist and pursue happiness in his own right. It is an interesting juncture that makes viewers absorb and consider the role of parenting, of acculturation, of induction into society, of initiation into morality that welds beings into individuals. Notwithstanding the education he acquires, when he is not acknowledged by the family of Felix, the old man's son, who are sighted and not blind, he destroys it, just as he destroys William, Clerval, Justine and Elizabeth, all of whom *belong* in some way to the house of *Frankenstein*, whereas he does not belong anywhere. The great irony is that Frankenstein's family name has been lent to foundlings and unfortunate children from other families who had been taken in by the family: Elizabeth and Justine are both such girls. But the family did not extend itself to the creature, or provide him a home. The crucial episode with the child William Frankenstein, Victor's much younger sibling, has the creature fleeing with William in his grasp, interestingly on a narrow bridge or a ridge, suggesting there is little scope for escape, there are no choices that the creature has learnt; he has not learnt to make choices or not act upon his instincts that would make him not kill William as his urges dictate. There is a crucial scene of affection and loyalty between Victor and William his young brother, with Victor explaining his life's ambition and divulging his secret pursuit to William once he believes he has discovered the prime spark of life which makes him "breathe the breath of God."²⁸ William bears the name of Frankenstein, a name that should belong to the creature, too, but has been denied him; he has not even been given the dignity of a name. Another comic poignant moment has the creature calling himself "lost thing" after what the kind old man calls him, discovering him to be a foundling. Cumberbatch stresses how the creature's primary want is "to belong, all he wants is to belong," and when no one claims him, he remains the perpetual exile for whom no laws are binding. That, indeed, is his power. This curious lack of conflict, this strange mix of strength and vulnerability, this pre-moral, primordial state of consciousness crossed with a questioning mind trying to comprehend the world, is aptly demonstrated through the performances of Cumberbatch and Miller. The twin productions turn our eye away from the 'horror' of Frankenstein's creature and make us ask fundamental questions: what it means to be human, what defines humanity, and how one must bear the pain of human existence.²⁹

(Endnotes)

1. Since the twin productions were available for viewing for a limited period on *Youtube*, and have been taken down by National Theatre, the URL cannot be provided here
2. "The Creature: A Character Study: *Frankenstein*: National Theatre at Home" *Youtube*, uploaded by National Theatre, 1 Sep 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRxOtaPAx1c>
3. *Frankenstein (1910) HD*. *Youtube*, uploaded by Videocellar, 16 Feb, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRxOtaPAx1c>
4. Golem is a figure from Jewish folklore: a gigantic creature created out of clay and animated by a Jewish rabbi when his flock started to go astray, that instilled fear in people, but vanished when the rabbi felt it was not needed anymore.
5. "Doubling: *Frankenstein* and the Creature. *Frankenstein*. National Theatre at Home." *Youtube*, uploaded by National Theatre, 1 Sep2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wanlO8fb1co>
6. "Benedict Cumberbatch Introduces *Frankenstein* " *Youtube*, uploaded by National Theatre, August 27, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yUMbxSTWqg>
7. *Frankenstein (1910) HD*. *Youtube*, uploaded by VideoCellar, 16 Feb, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRxOtaPAx1c>
8. "Frankenstein Birth and Death" *Youtube*, uploaded by Robert Stewart, 16 Dec, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7EnOwKXyHc>
9. Ibid. Elizabeth Lavenza is played by Helena Bonham Carter in this 1994 production of *Frankenstein* directed by Kenneth Branagh.
10. Characters in William Shakespeare's 1610-11 play *Tempest*, a play subjected to much postcolonial criticism.
11. "Interview with Danny Boyle and Nick Dear". *Youtube*, uploaded by *mentevclo*, National Theatre, 7 Jun 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mbDmwpJ_h0&t=948s
12. *Trainspotting* .Directed by Danny Boyle, performances by Ethan Hawke, EwenBremner and Johnny Lee Miller, PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, 1996.

14. Roach, Joseph. "Culture and Performance." *Performativity and Performance*, edited by Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Routledge, 1995, pp.46-8.
15. "Theatre of Cruelty." *Wikipedia*, last edited 17 May, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre_of_Cruelty.
16. Kristeva, Julia. "Modern Theatre Does Not Take (A) Place" Translated by Alice Jardine and Thomas Gora. *SubStance*, Winter, 1977 - Spring, 1978, Vol. 6/7, No. 18/19, *Theater in France: Ten Years of Research* (Winter, 1977 - Spring, 1978), The Johns Hopkins University Presspp. 131-134. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3683988>
17. Ibid. Written in 1977, in this essay Kristeva identifies silent theatre that nevertheless incorporates sound, music and gestures with the 'lethal' semiotic drive that exists within a region of the speaking subject, a 'threshold' drive that operates just before one enters the realm of the symbolic, before things compulsorily have to make sense.
18. "Directing *Frankenstein*. Academy Award Winner Danny Boyle". National Theatre at Home." Uploaded on 1 Sep 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E67Ty4diDgE>
20. In her 1977 essay "Modern Theatre Does Not Take (A) Place," Kristeva talks of modern or contemporary theatre of the 1970s not so much as a failure of representation since it amply employs verbal language, but as a "failure of de-monstration". I imply here that while reinstating 'de-monstration' to theatre, Boyle's theatre is also 'de-monster'-ing Frankenstein's creature, in a sense.
21. Same as (ii) above.
22. Same as (xvii) above.
23. Kayser, Wolfgang. *The Grottesque in Art and Literature* . Translated by Ulrich Weisstein, Indiana University Press, 1963, pp.21-2.
24. Same as (xi) above. "Interview with Danny Boyle and Nick Dear" *Youtube*, Uploaded by Mentevclo, 7 June 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mbDmwpJ_h0&t=952s
25. Same as (ii) above

26. Same as (xi) above
27. Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, 1982, pp.1-9.
28. "Official Clip: Spark of Life: *Frankenstein* : National Theatre at Home." Uploaded by National Theatre, 28 Apr 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psAtbHDdaOU>
29. This is how Nick Dear sums up the essence of his play adaptation in "The Creature: A Character Study. *Frankenstein*. National Theatre at Home." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRxOtaPAxlc>

**Foregrounding the Background: Re-Historicising
the Fall of Vijayanagara Empire and Girish Karnad's
*Crossing to Talikota***

Saurabh Kumar Singh & Ashutosh Singh

The dramatic acumen of Girish Karnad is well established and widely acclaimed as he has been the one appointed as the World Theater ambassador of the International theatre Institute, Paris. In the scenario of modern Indian theatre Girish Karnad belongs to the formative generation of Indian playwrights who came to maturity in the 1960s and 1970s, and collectively endeavored to reshape Indian theatre as a major national institution. Though Girish Karnad exemplifies the transformative practices of his generation, but at the same time he has created a distinctive place for himself with respect to subject matter, dramatic style and technique, and authorial identity. It can well be justified when we look at the creative corpus of him. His plays can be grouped /categorized as the plays based on myth like *Yayati*, *The Fire and the Rain*, and *Bali: the Sacrifice*; plays based on folktales like *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, and *Flowers: A Monologue*; plays employing contemporary settings like *Anju Mallige* (literally, 'Frightened Jasmine'), *Broken Images*, *Wedding Album* and *Boiled Beans on Toast*, and history plays like *Tughlaq*, *Tale-Danda*, *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, and the last one (as Karnad died on June 10th 2019) *Crossing to Talikota*.

The myth, history and folk based plays of Karnad are designed to enkindle an ancient and pre-modern world that vibrates in contemporary contexts because of his contemporary consciousness which remakes the past in the image of the present. In his mammoth attempt to forge a theatre of our own, Karnad has discovered and re-invented the diverse patterns of Indian and world theatre by not only drawing on myths,

histories, and folktales, but also on the plays having contemporary settings and thus have rejuvenated, expanded and energized the poetics of contemporary Indian drama. Apart from being a celebrated dramatist he also has been a noted film maker and actor. He has been honored with the Padma Bhushan and was conferred prestigious Jnanpith Award for his literary contributions.

The last play of Karnad *Crossing to Talikota* focuses on his continuous engagements with the history of the Deccan. He in the preface to this play categorically states:

When one looks at the history of the Deccan during the last millennium, three events stand out, not only for their importance for the region, but for the impact they have had on the political and cultural map of the whole of India: the revolution created by the Lingayat- poet philosophers under Basavanna and the Vacanakaras in the twelfth century, the spectacular achievements of Vijayanagara Empire for centuries later, and the reign of Tipu Sultan, which was the last assertion of national pride against colonial onslaught. All three ended catastrophically but left legacies that continue to shape national life and thought even today. (ix)

We all know that Karnad has already written plays on Basavanna in *Tale-Danda* (in the wake of Mandal Commission) (1990), and on Tipu Sultan in *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (1997) which was commissioned by British Broadcasting Corporation to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Indian independence from British rule. Karnad could write his dream project/play *Crossing to Talikota* on the fall of Vijayanagara empire only in 2019 before his death. The play depicts the fall of this empire following the fierce battle at Talikota in the year 1565.

Here Karnad recreates this history while focusing on important different Royal households of Deccan Sultanates such as Ali Adil Shah, Sultan of Bijapur; Hussain Nizam Shah, Sultan of Ahmadnagar; Ali Barid Shah, Sultan of Bidar; Ibahim Qutb Shah, Sultan of Golconda; and their relationships with ‘Aliya’ Rama Raya, the ruler of Vijayanagara. The dramatist rewrites the political history of this empire with utmost clarity of conscience. Being a dramatist Karnad has shown his dramatic excellence

in portraying the characters through dialogues. He has tried to provide an alternative perspective to the received history of ‘forgotten empire’, or ‘never-to be forgotten empire’, or ‘never forgotten empire’ (Ramanujan Vijayanagara ix). He has re-envisioned the history in terms of story, thus, adhering to certain norms of new historicist perspectives. This paper has been divided in three sections: First, it will discuss certain theoretical aspects of New Historicism, second it will provide a brief sketch of political history of Vijayanagara Empire, and third, it will try to analyse the play in the light of certain aspects of New Historicism.

I

In 19th century there were two major approaches to study a literary writing. One considered literary writings to be isolated from its immediate social realities; literary writing as the individual achievement of the genius, achieved while sitting in an ‘ivory tower’. The other looked upon works not as isolated, natural, divine, talking about essential truth of life but rather as a social construct, as a part of larger cultural history. To put it brief, this approach located a work in the context of social, political, and cultural history. This is what Thomas Carlyle wrote, “The history of a nation’s poetry is the essence of its history, political, scientific, religious” (as quoted in A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory 180). In 20th century we find numerous literary theories but most important one is New Criticism. New Criticism in its broader aspects focused on the autonomy of a text; separating it from social and political contexts and the concept of close reading. It practiced the study of images, metaphors, and symbols. As a representation of old historicism E.M.W. Tillyard published his two books *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943) and *Shakespeare’s History Plays* (1944) which argued that literature of the Elizabethan period expressed the spirit of the age which was based on the concepts like chain of being, the divine order and the mutual exchanges of heavenly and earthly existences. He saw Elizabethan as a unified spectacle which remained aloof from dissenting and discursive voices. These happened to be too traditional perspectives for the critics of 1970s and 1980s. There was a kind of denial of such a simplistic approach. In opposition to this/these, as a new mode of critical inquiry New Historicism appeared in 1980s in America. The term was coined by the American

critic Stephen Greenblatt whose book *Renaissance Self Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* is usually considered as the beginning. This theory came in the wake of deconstruction which undermines the attempts of various literary/critical theories to recover historical truth. New Historicism rejects the idea of authorial supremacy and his/her genius. It also shows its disrespect and disrupts the established canons of great writings. New Historicists with the help of the insights provided by Michel Foucault argued about a new non-truth oriented form of study of texts. Raman Selden and others in their book *A Readers' Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* write about following major concern of New Historicism as a poststructuralist theory:

The relations between literature and history must be rethought. There is no stable and fixed 'history' which can be treated as the 'background' against which literature can be foregrounded. All history (histories) is 'foreground'. 'History' is always a matter of telling a story about the past, using other texts as our intertexts. 'Non literary' texts produced by lawyers, popular writers, theologians, scientists and historians should not be treated as belonging to a different order of textuality. Literary texts should not be regarded as sublime and transcendent expressions of the 'human spirit', but as texts among other texts. We cannot now accept that a privileged 'inner' world of 'great authors' is to be set against the background of an 'outer' world of ordinary history. (181-182)

It has already been pointed out that Foucault has a greater amount of influence on the theoretical aspects of New Historicism. Foucault in his writings has talked about how the identities are constructed, policed and subverted. Instead of one unified and singular version of history Foucault talks about a historical period as a site of conflict where there is the occurrence of multiple discursive elements which come into play in various strategies (1984 100). His most important contribution to contemporary history is his concept of power. He opines that power is not something which can be acquired or seized, which one holds or shares with other. Instead power is exercise through innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations (ibid 94). It means that power simply can never be held in some powerful human beings,

those who are rulers and is imposed on those who are weak and powerless. Power, as Foucault perceives, involves layers of interactions, conflicts and communications. He opines that, “Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere ... It is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (ibid 93). Foucault here expresses his views that power is imminent, it always remains unstable; it is fluid in nature; and most importantly every attempt to deploy power also gives a way to its resistance. This presence of resistance makes the ways for the emergence of numerous identities, institutions, and alternative ways of thinking.

Cultural Materialism has been conceived as British counterpart of American New Historicism. The term was borrowed from Raymond Williams, the British Marxist critic, by Jonathan Dollimore. Cultural Materialists like their American counterpart have worked extensively on Renaissance literature and society. But here the similarity ends. The New Historicists like Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose, Jonathan Goldberg, Stephen Orgel and Leonard Tennenhouse, as Raman Selden and others argue, explore the ways in which Elizabethan literary texts like dramas, masques, and pastorals act out the concerns of Tudor monarchy, reproducing and renewing the powerful discourses which sustain the system. They see monarchy governing the power structure. In a generalized perspective one can state that New Historicists have, by and large, been associated with pessimistic understanding of discursive power in literary representations of Elizabethan and Jacobean social order (*A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* 183). On the other hand Cultural Materialists like Jonathan Dollimore, Alan Sinfield, Francis Barker, Catherine Belsey and others, influenced by Raymond Williams, Foucault, Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci, Mikhail Bakhtin and various feminist critics, have come up with more radical notions of discursive power structures which largely rest upon the note of optimism.

II

The history of Deccan in 14th and 15th century evolve around two great kingdoms: the Vijayanagara and the Bahmani which engaged in perpetual confrontations for more than 200 years to have domination

over that region. These kingdoms excelled in two distinct areas: first, they built magnificent cities and capitals with beautiful building structures and also promoted arts and letters/literatures; second, they maintained law and order to promote material aspects of life by providing congenial atmosphere for the development of commerce and handicraft. According to Satish Chandra, a noted historian:

Thus, while the forces of disintegration gradually triumphed in north India, south India and the Deccan had a long spell of stable governments. This ended with the disintegration of Bahmani empire towards the end of the fifteenth century, and of the Vijayanagara empire more than fifty years later, after its defeat in 1565 in the battle of Bannihatti. Meanwhile, the Indian scene was transformed, first with the arrival of the Portuguese in southern India and their attempt to dominate the Indian seas, and second, with the advent of the Mughals in north India. (History of Medieval India 138)

It is an established fact beyond doubt that the mighty Vijayanagara empire as founded by Harihara and Bukka who belonged to a family of five brothers. But the identities of these brothers, sons of Sangama, are shrouded in obscurity. There are two traditions which connect them to Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Satish Chandra refers to a legend according to which they had been the feudatories of the Kakatiyas (in the service of Prataprudra II) of Warangal and later became ministers in the kingdom of Kampili in modern Karnataka (138). When Kampili, a small kingdom in modern Bellari, was attacked by Muhammad Tughlaq for giving refuge to Muslim rebel, the raja of this kingdom died a heroic death in an unsuccessful rebellion against Tughlaq's authority. But the king's eleven sons had no desire for martyrdom. The Arab traveler Ibn Batuta, who met three of these sons sometime between 1337 to 1342 records that the sultan of Delhi had made them all imperial amirs in consideration of their good and decent behaviour and the good conduct of their father (as quoted in *A Social History of the Deccan* 39). It is a quite a possibility that Harihara and Bukka too were made amirs and converted to Islam. According to Phillip B. Wagoner, "Delhi Sultan had bestowed the entire Karnataka country on Harihara and Bukka because the Sultan, in his wisdom, had recognized the two men as eminently trustworthy, and

hence deserving of imperial service (312-20). Though Phillip does not talk about Harihara and Bukka's conversion to Islam but Satish Chandra talks of this and also writes that very soon the two brothers forsook the new master as well as the new faith. At the instance of their guru, Vidyaranya, they were readmitted to Hinduism and established their capital at Vijayanagara (139).

If we look at the glorious/inglorious history of Vijayanagara we come to know about four major dynasties which ruled it. They are as follows: Sangama dynasty (1336-1485), Saluva dynasty (1485-1505), Tuluva dynasty (1505-1570), and Aravidu dynasty (1570-1675).

III

Robert Sewell and his book *A Forgotten Empire, Vijayanagara* (1900), happens to be the first authentic book which draws our attention to the mighty Vijayanagara empire especially the battle of Talikota. This book happens to be the treasure house for anybody interested in knowing the medieval history of the Deccan specially Vijayanagara. Sewell was an ICS officer of the British Raj and he was posted at Bellary. He characterizes Vijayanagara as "a Hindu bulwark against Muhammadan conquests" (Sewell 1). According to S.R. Ramanujan, a journalist and a historiographer, though, the book is seminal but not without its faults. While highlighting the major defects he writes:

Sewell's main sources for his book are the chronicles of FernaoNuntz, a Portuguese horse trader who was in the capital during the reign Achyuta Raya, Domingo Pacs, a Portuguese horse trader again and supplier of horses to Krishna Deva Raya and MohdQasimFirishta who wrote on the history of Bahmani sultans. Most of the accounts of these foreign travellers was based on hearsay, street gossip folk stories and clueless observations. (Vijayanagara ix)

He further adds that the primary focus of these accounts were the confrontations and battles between Vijayanagara and Bahmani sultans which was fraught with religious biases. So it was less history and more about fancy in terms of exaggeration to derive pleasures (ibid x).

Girish Karnad expresses the similar opinion in the preface to the play and writes that Sewell was the victim of colonialist interpretation which simply focused on simple religious antagonism to be the base of the conflict. This interpretation, according to dramatist, has deeply influenced, and continues to shape subsequent academic studies, although research since then has shown how simplistic and reductionist Sewell's understanding of the situation was (x). Here Karnad must be addressing to the altered historical scenario where religious intolerance especially between Hindu and Muslim is at its peak. Like his preceding plays based on history Karnad does not fail to make a valid comment on the contemporary situations through the insights gained from past.

The dramatist relooks, rereads, and recreates the history through the help of different kinds of perspectives provided by New Historicism. True to the belief of this theory that there is no one and unified history Karnad also shows that there are several discontinuous histories. His historiography goes beyond dates and chronicles provided by canonical authors. He imagines a story, with facts as well, and offers us a history in terms of story. In this way he brings into light the ignored and not too much considered aspects. He literally foregrounds the background. He concentrates on Rama Raya and his relationship with other sultans of the times to exorcise the ghost of communal and religious frenzy which one finds in Sewell and others. Karnad acknowledges his sense of gratitude to Kirtinath Kurtkoti who drew his attention to the seminal role played by 'Aliya' (Son-in law) Rama Raya in the Talikota battle. He also refers to Richard M. Eaton's essay on Rama Raya in *A Social History of the Deccan 1300-1761* where he describes him as a character of tragic dimensions and an exceptional absolute ruler without being accepted as the head (ibid x).

The play opens with the prologue which depicts the aftermath of battle of Talikota. It is apparent that Rama Raya has lost the battle to allied forces of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, Bidar, and Golconda. The city of Vijayanagara is being robbed and looted. The temples are being broken. Common civilians are being murdered. They are starving. They have no property, and no family too as one civilian says, "We've nothing with us. Our houses were burnt down to ashes. They even dog up the foundations

to look for hidden fortunes. We live like jackals. Foraging at night” (Crossing to Talikota4). Tirumala Raya’s, the Commander-in-Chief, eye is pierced by an arrow. He has run away from the battle field. An unbelievable thing has happened. But nobody believes it to be true. Royal elephants are being arranged for the rescue of royal personages like Satyabhama, late Deva Raya’s wife, Tirumalamba, the Queen Mother, Sadashiva Raya, the king and others. They have their own doubts regarding the defeat of Rama Raya. But Tirumala clears the doubt as he says, “The battle’s gone badly for us. Our army’s been put to rout. There’s terrible bloodshed on the battlefield – it’s the end of the world. And brother was swept into the chaos. Before anyone could do anything – we lost sight of him” (11).

Act I takes place in 1559 when the Vijayanagara is at the height of its glory under the dynamic leadership of Rama Raya who is now 70 years old. He has lost his younger son Suratrana Rama Raya. Apparently the sultan of Bijapur Adil Shah is visiting the court as a courtesy to offer his condolence and sense of consolation. Despite a long history of conflicts and confrontations between the two families he shows his determination and valour to enter into the territory of enemy almost unarmed. He is well aware of the military power of Rama Raya and says, “We in the Deccan know of their immense military prowess, not merely by their reputation, but by having on occasion even experienced it personally” (I iii 18). This military power and its strength is also supported by an inscription dated 1430 in which there is the inscription that Devaraya II had recruited 10000 Turkish cavalry (as quoted in A Social History 87). In order to strengthen himself he also recruited to his service 3000 Westerners who had been dismissed from the Bijapur service, which Rama Raya himself deployed (ibid). Adil Shah also appreciates the beauty and the wealth of the Vijayanagara Empire. He is scared by the ‘grandeur’ of the city which consists of ‘wide avenues’, ‘gardens’, ‘the landscaped terraces’, ‘open markets’, selling ‘precious stones and silk’, and ‘rare scents’ which he has read in the fantasy *Alif Laila* (20). He even goes further and requests Rama Raya to accept him as his son, *farzand*. Rama Raya is deeply touched and takes him to Satyabhama, his wife and Tirumalamba, the Queen Mother. He calls Rama Raya as ‘Appaji’. We

see Rama Raya deeply impressed by the courage and modesty of Adil Shah. He is conscious of his material and military power. He loves to be appreciated. He likes to be appreciated and honoured. He is confident of his power as a ruler and in that he offers the city of Kalyana which once has been in the custody of Adil Shah's father. It is Rama Raya who hands over this city to the sultan of Ahmadnagar, Husain Nizam Shah. The city of Kalyana is very dear to Ramaraya. He shares childhood memories and relations with this city. He bursts out emotionally:

Kalyana! Kalyana! The source of my lineage— the fountain from which my forefathers sprang— the city of the great Chalukyas! That's where the seed of my family took root, sprouted, branched out, blossomed, reached out for the heavens— but as fortune has ordained today, I bear the responsibility of looking after the empire of Vijayanagara. All I can do is look at my ancestral city of Kalyana from a distance, across the River Krishna, while my own arms are loaded with responsibilities my father-in-law, Krishna Raya, has nailed me down with. Can you imagine anything more heart-rending? But I cannot abandon Kalyana to aliens. I have to ensure its welfare. When Barid Shah started misbehaving I took it away and gave it to Nizam Shah. But now that the bonds of Vijayanagara and Bijapur have been soldered together again I shall entrust it to you. Kalyana! My Kalyana! Please, please, farzand, look after it with care. (ibid 25)

One can easily perceive the kind of emotional attachment Rama Raya is giving to the city of Kalyana. Kalyana is like prize or his personal commodity which he keeps on giving from one person to another. It shows his autocracy, though he is the ruler only, not the king. King was Sadasiva Raya who was imprisoned and was allowed to give public appearance once in a year or no appearance at all.

He does not realize the consequence of this. Whether the sultan of Ahmadnagar becomes happy or sad, it doesn't matter at all. He is least worried about any kind of rebellious attitude from sultan. But his brothers are aware that this is not a good move at all. They know that this might provoke Nizam Shah. But who is going to raise the voice, nobody. And it would be no exaggeration at all in saying that this love for Kalyana

paved the road to famous/infamous Talikota. Already I have mentioned the heritage of Sewell which receives strong criticism by the noted historian Eaton. He writes:

But a scrutiny of the relations between Rama Raya and his northern neighbors reveals two important points. First, no party appears to have been motivated by religious concerns. And second, the Battle of Talikota, far from being a sudden, isolated event, possessed a very deep history. In fact, the battle grew out of several decades of conflict in which Rama Raya had chosen to ally himself with one or another of his neighbors. (94)

This is what Girish Karnad, too, expresses in his play. When Nizam Shah comes to know of this news he becomes worried. At this point of time his Begum has to offer something very relevant. She makes him to understand the current scenario and instigates him:

What did you expect him to do? After all, it was Ramaraya who gifted the fort of Kalyana to us. So let's not be sanctimonious. Now, Adil Shah wants his turn. He's doing exactly what you did ten years ago. Have you thought of how long you all are going to go on like this— accepting alms from Rama Raya. Today, he wants Kalyana to be handed over to Bijapur. Tomorrow, he'll say give it to Golkonda. Then, he'll say it's the turn of Bidar. And you'll wait around him— bowing and scraping— salivating? (Crossing to Talikota I iv 28-29)

She also points out the autocratic nature of Rama Raya and his fantasy to restore, claim a royal lineage for himself – the Chalukyas of Kalyana (30). The Sultan has no option left except to accept Adil Shah or get into a war. At this crucial juncture his Begum gives him the idea of consolidating himself while marrying their daughters Chand Bibi and Bibi Jamal to Adil Shah and Ibrahim Qutb Shah, the sultan of Golconda respectively. Here, through the character of Begum, Karnad has achieved two things. First, the idea that Rama Raya does not have loyalty to land region, religion, and ethnic group rather he is more loyal to his family and faction. This is quite glaring in one of the statements of Rama Raya when he says Kalyana to be 'the source of hallowed dynasty of the

Chalukyas', the source of his 'bloodline' and his eternal namaskaras to 'my Chalukya forefathers' (I vi 43). Historian Richard M. Eaton draws our attention to the mere hyperbole titles of Rama Raya as 'Chalukya Emperor', or 'Lord of Kalyana' (95). Second, the dramatist chooses a woman, a minor character from the andocentric world, to speak such insightful talks, displaying her understating and intelligence. It can be possible only in New Historicist perspective where minor and weak characters are brought to light to determine the future course of action.

Rama Raya has been depicted as one displaying unnecessary use of his power. He is seething in the taste of power. He does not want to lose any opportunity to make his neighbor, Nizam Shah, feel jilted and humiliated. That's why he is revealing his plan to his younger brother Tirumala, "I have asked Nizam Shah to come there and hand the keys over to me. It's not enough to snatch Kalyana away from him. We need to take him down a peg or two in the eyes of his populace" (I v 39). He also wants Jahangir Khan, the Commander of Ahmadnagar Fort and the protector of the honor of Nizam Shah and his family, to be beheaded. Eaton provides a very graphic description of the whole incident. He records:

Swallowing his pride, Husain submitted to each of Rama Raya's humiliating demands. First, he ordered Jahangir Khan executed. Then he proceeded to the Vijayanagara camp outside Ahmadnagar's fort and entered Rama Raya's tent. Rising to his feet, Rama Raya took the defeated sultan by the hand. But Husain, offended at having to touch the skin of his enemy, called for a basin of water to wash his hands. Enraged at this breach of etiquette, Rama Raya turned aside and muttered in Kannada "If he were not my guest, I would cut off his hands and hang them round his neck." Calling for water, he too washed his hands. Husain then gave the keys to Kalyana fort to Rama Raya. At that moment the Vijayanagara ruler was indeed, if only briefly, the "lord" of Kalyana, his sovereignty unmediated by any other ruling authority. But, with no thought of actually annexing territory so far from Vijayanagara, and desiring only a symbolic sovereignty over his northern "vassal," Rama Raya immediately sent the keys to his ally 'Ali Adil Shah I of

Bijapur. Then, for his final and most humiliating act of submission, Husain ate *pan* from the hand of Rama Raya. (97)

The marriage, the alliance, mentioned above, takes place, and Rama Raya is not invited neither by Nizam Shad nor by Adil Shah, the *farzand*; son. War is inevitable. The four sultans: Husain Nizam Shah, Adil Shah, Ali Barid Shah, and Ibrahim Qutb Shah have come together to wage a war against Rama Raya. Satyabhama, the wife of Rama Raya, requests her brother-in-laws Tirumala and Venkatadri to lead the army as Rama Raya is old enough. But the prejudices, biases and the desire to be the king of Rama Raya burst out as he says they are not 'Tuluva', they are 'great Chalukya lineage', and they are 'Aravidu'. He is not happy with his designation as 'son-in-law' of Krishna Raya. 'Aliya' Rama Raya, Ram Raya the 'son-in-law' is dead (Crossing II viii 54-55), and envisions, "A new age will emerge out of this encounter. I am Partha, the Supreme King of the Aravidu clan, the returning scion of the Chalukyas. Let's welcome the new age! To Chalukya glory (II viii 56)!

Scene ix takes place in the outskirts of Bijapur. All four sultans are united and are planning the strategies to combat Rama Raya. Though when we look at these sultans it is all clear that, prior to this meeting, they were plotting against one another. Adil Shah seems to be little reluctant to wage a war against his 'Appaji'. It was Rama Raya who was always with him whenever he needed, not the other sultans. Rama Raya's wife has called her as 'farzand'. Due to this he is not in a condition to make up his mind. But when other sultans begin to consider the callous and arrogant attitude of Rama Raya who by exercising his power has put them against each other; He has murdered innocent person like Jahangir Khan. He is a vice incarnated. Then Adil too joins them by pointing out the threat which he received from Rama Raya, "Remember, marrying my daughter's enemy will make you my enemy" (II IX 60). His intention is clear as Adil puts, "I shall be in charge of your personal life too henceforth" (ibid). Adil can accept anything but he cannot allow anyone, even 'Appaji', to put a check to his personal liberty and freedom.

The Queen Mother Tirumalamba understands the urgency to go for a compromise, a treaty. But ruler of Vijayanagara is adamant and is seething in self glorification, acting like a megalomaniac.

I shouldn't be concerned, mother. They are in the palm of my hand and have until now been content to live in the space allotted to them. It's beneath my dignity to deal or negotiate with them. It's beneath your dignity which is important, for you are the Queen Mother of the Chalukya realm. I shall decimate in no time. Just watch. (II x 63)

He is fighting for 'my glory', 'for the glory of Aravidu dynasty, and 'for the honour of Kalyana Chalukyas' (II xi 68). He is not fighting for the glory of Vijayanagara empire. He is defeated and has accepted it. But he is not being coward or fearful. He is the master of a towering personality. And when Nizam Shah comes face to face with him he is not on a position to muster up the courage to kill him which has been his life-long obsession. He has vanquished 'the uneatable', 'the pestilence', and finally asks Rumi Khan who has impaled the head of 'Head' on the spear, "Take this to Kashi to wash it of its sins! And here is my dowry to you, Adil Shah. The Deccan! The whole of Deccan" (II xiii 74)!

'There is properly no history, only biography', stated Ralph Waldo Emerson, the pioneer of American Transcendentalism. True to this spirit New Historicism believes more in stories behind the histories as depicted in literary writings. Girish Karnad, as a sincere and sensitive playwright/thinker, has always been occupied to uncover the layered structures of the past to clear the dust and fog of present form of historiography. He tries to understand the present in the light of the past because he doesn't believe merely in the pastness of the past but of its presence too. By recreating the past of the mighty Vijayanagara ruler Rama Raya and his relationships with his neighbouring sultans, the playwright is simply trying to make the reader understand that the wrongs of previous history must not be imposed on present readers. True to the spirit of Brechtian 'complex seeing' he is asking us not to accept any simple chronicling and dating of history. History is not unified spectacle. History has many layers and a conscious attempt should be made to understand this. The way in 21st century there has been the emergence of communalism whereby the questions of insider/outsider, majority/minority seem to be in the focal point of major discourses; in this situation it is really difficult to listen to one's conscience. It becomes more difficult when the past is levied

against the present to give us a unidirectional impression. And precisely this must have been the purpose of Girish Karnad. He is emphasizing the point that those who think communalism to be the reason behind the fall of Vijayanagara, they are preoccupied rather with the same rather than the people and culture which they are trying to understand. There is no need to continue with that legacy. New readings, perspectives, histories are utmost required to witness a transformed consciousness.

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Futuristic Dramaturgy and Posthumanist Culture in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*: A Critical Study

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Abstract: *Indian drama that plausibly originated from ancient rituals and customs, has had a rich and glorious tradition. Significantly, the most noteworthy record of Indian dramaturgy, “Natyasastra Ascribed to Bharata Muni: A Treatise of Ancient Indian Dramaturgy and Histrionics”, was written roughly between the 5th century BCE to the 7th or 8th century CE. With time, dramaturgy in India has gone through substantial progression creating avenues for innovative stagecraft and modern aesthetics. The stalwarts of modern Indian drama produced outstanding plays on diverse themes drawing on both ancient and modern Indian dramaturgy. Manjula Padmanabhan's arrival into the realm of modern Indian drama has breathed fresh air into the domain since she deliberates more on innovative dramaturgy motifs for the evocative representation of the dystopian social order in her plays. The present study is an attempt at exploring the futuristic dramaturgy adopted for the representation of posthumanist culture in Padmanabhan's award-winning play Harvest. An effort has been made to trace the subtlety and depth with which Padmanabhan deals with the form of science fiction through the language and medium of drama.*

Keywords: *Manjula Padmanabhan, Harvest, futuristic dramaturgy, posthumanism.*

Throughout its chequered journey from ancient to modern dramaturgy, Indian drama has always remained one of the most resourceful forms of art committed to a wide-ranging representation of life, society, culture, among others. With time, dramaturgy in Indian theatre has undergone a significant evolution opening up newer and innovative ideas of stagecraft

and diverse theatrical representation of life on stage. It is interesting to note that drama in India is as old as its customs and the most notable work of Indian dramaturgy, *Natyasastra: Treatise of Ancient Indian Dramaturgy and Histrionics*, Ascribed to Bharata Muni, dates back to roughly between the 5th century BCE to the 7th or 8th century CE. Since long, Indian drama has been thriving on both page and stage and has received wider recognition both at home and abroad. Even though drama forms a major corpus of Indian literature, Indian drama in English emerged as late as in 1831 when Krishna Mohana Banerjea published *The Persecuted* which is arguably the first English drama written by an Indian in colonial India. Although Indian drama in English never flourished as much as Indian English poetry or fiction, occasional publications and sporadic stage performances kept this sub-genre of Indian drama alive until it received its much-needed impetus from two of the most prominent contemporary playwrights - Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan. Before their arrival into the arena, Indian theatre had been flourishing in the safe hands of the stalwarts like Mohan Rakesh, Grish Karnad, Badal Sircar, Habib Tanvir and Vijay Tendulkar, among others. These torchbearers of Indian drama and theatre were all master craftsmen. With their creations, they established modern Indian drama and theatre on a firm base. They recreated history, myths, folktales and legends in their plays and, at the same time, presented a true reflection of society/culture. As far as dramaturgy is concerned, these forebears of modern Indian drama set a tradition of modern Indian dramaturgy as well. Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan are ably carrying the tradition forward adding their own creative inputs and theatrical skills. Set in contemporary Indian society, Mahesh Dattani's plays reflect multiple issues in a vast urban canvas through the use of dramaturgy patterns such as split level stage, seamless movement of time from the present to past, significant representation of music and dance on stage, use of varied stage props as theatrical signs, powerful verbal and visual language, among others. On the other hand, Manjula Padmanabhan's plays are mostly set in dystopian society and she deliberates more on innovative dramaturgy motifs for the evocative representation of the dystopian world in her plays. The present study is an attempt at exploring the futuristic dramaturgy adopted for the representation of posthumanist culture in Padmanabhan's award-winning play *Harvest*.

An effort has been made to trace the subtlety and depth with which Padmanabhan deals with the form of science fiction through the language and medium of drama.

Written in 1996 and first published in India in 1998, *Harvest* is by far the most innovative, ingenious and futuristic piece in the dramatic oeuvre of Manjula Padmanabhan. The play is very different from any other play written by an Indian playwright because of the peculiarity of the genre – a sci-fi-play, if we may call it so. Because of this innovative genre, *Harvest* has always remained a hard nut for theatre practitioners, especially in India where most of the theatre groups produce plays with little or almost no financial assistance. Indeed, it is difficult to theatrically represent a fictitious story based on science and do justice to the play-text. No wonder, *Harvest* has received mixed responses in India and the playwright seems well aware of the reasons behind that:

It does not surprise me that *Harvest* has a rough reception in India. It *is* an odd play. It has not had a definitive, professional performance that might be used as a reference point. It's science fiction, which is rare for the stage. (Padmanabhan 184)

Yes, *Harvest* is quite 'rare', even a bit tricky to be executed on stage but certainly not 'unperformable' as many Indian theatre professionals had thought when the play was published for the first time in 1998 by Kali for Women. Although the play had won the inaugural Onassis Prize, it was not received warmly in India for multifarious reasons. Nevertheless, the play did have its premiere in 1999 performed by the Yatrik theatre group under the direction of Joy Michael, the owner of the group. Since then, the play has been staged occasionally both in India and abroad. "In 2000, it was performed in Greece, in Greek, at the prestigious Theatro Technis Karolos Koun in Athens, directed by Mimis Kouiyountzis and supported by funds from the Onassis Foundation. In 2001, it was performed as a radio broadcast on the BBC" (Padmanabhan 183). However, as far as the performances in India are concerned, the language of the play seems to have posed hindrances. Firstly, Indian theatre flourished mostly through lively performances of vernacular plays. There have always been theatre groups performing in corresponding regional languages. English plays being produced on stage have been much

infrequent. If there have been such performances at all, they have mostly been confined in metros and out of the reach of common theatregoers. Secondly, the English language plays in Indian theatre seems to problematize the idea of verisimilitude. As Padmanabhan herself admits, “*Harvest*’s characters are identified as Bombay slum dwellers but they speak in standard English, with no familiar “Bombaiya” slang to make them relatable” (184). Indeed, it may seem difficult and, even unrealistic to see Indian slum dwellers speaking in English on stage. This may create a problem for the audience, as most of them would find it difficult to correlate. There is no denying the fact that this is a major problem when it comes to the staging of Indian English plays in India for the larger sections of the audience are yet to accept English as the language of performance. The plays of Mahesh Dattani also suffer from a similar problem caused due to language barriers. But then, both Dattani and Padmanabhan write in typical ‘Indian English’ which their characters speak with spontaneity and straight forwardness. For both Dattani and Padmanabhan, English is not a foreign language but their own language in which they think, speak and write. Therefore, their plays cannot simply be ignored because of the fact that they are written in English. On the contrary, their plays deserve plenty of applause for keeping the tradition of Indian English plays alive and for strengthening the identity of the sub-genre of Indian English drama.

Padmanabhan’s *Harvest* is a futuristic play, a play that is much ahead of its time. It was written at a time when video calling had not seen the light of the day, “Skype and Face Time did not exist so the technology must have seemed far fetched” (Padmanabhan 184). That was in 1996. Since then technology has gone through a revolutionary advancement. Video calling is now a reality, so much so that anyone who owns a smartphone can avail of this facility just at a click. Therefore, what seemed out of the ordinary in 1996, is now anactuality, that too, a very common one. That is the beauty of sci-fi. Science fictions have always been imaginatively ahead of their time and eventually laid the foundations for scientists to work on concepts and bring them from the fictitious world to the factual world. This is not to say that *Harvest* has shown the scientists the way to work on video calling and make that happen, but to admit the

fact that Padmanabhan introduced a new dramaturgy that is contemporary and very fresh. She has shown the future playwrights a new avenue of adopting innovative dramaturgy to keep up with the changing time.

Harvest is primarily a play about the human condition. It depicts the struggle of its characters caught in a dystopian social order encompassed by posthumanist culture. The idea of the play originated from Padmanabhan's encounter with news stories about the illegal trade in human organs. And when this idea got support from the playwright's wings of imagination and creative faculties, it soared higher beyond known boundaries and resulted in the rarest of rare plays for the Indian stage. While the theme of the play focuses on the perennial struggle of man to cope up with his surrounding in his search for happiness, the playwright's treatment of the theme is inimitable. Like any other play-text, *Harvest* also opens with an account of the dramatis personae, but with a difference. The characters here are significantly classified into three categories: 'Donors', 'Receivers' and 'Guards and Agents'. It is interesting to note that the Donors who seem more human and humane than others, are representing bodies that serve as organ farms while the Receivers, Ginni and Virgil, are less humane and they never appear on stage but are either visible on the screen of the Contact Module or only heard. They, especially Virgil, seem more like what Manfred Clynes and Nathan S. Kline had termed as 'cyborg' or 'cybernetic organism'. On the other hand, the Guards and the Agents, though human beings, appear less humane and more robotic. They are machine-like creatures performing only assigned tasks and uttering discourses that are more like pre-installed mechanical speeches without feelings and emotions but with codes and commands. Through the action of these unusual characters, Padmanabhan has presented on stage the glaring truth of illegal harvesting of human organs – something that has always been operating behind the curtain irrespective of the existence of the laws that prohibit such trade. In *Harvest*, Padmanabhan lays bare the gruesome reality of commoditization of human bodies, especially of the downtrodden belonging to the so-called third world countries by those of the developed first-world nations. Like the clones in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *Never Let Me Go* (2005), the donors in Padmanabhan's play are mere bodies for the supply of organs

as and when needed in exchange for financial assistance and support for the donor and his/her family. Erin B. Mee sees *Harvest* as a personalization of the politics of organ donation in a global economy” (269). Through this ‘personalization’, Padmanabhan addresses a global issue, and it is this global focus that forms the essence of the play. Om, the twenty-year-old young man in *Harvest* has been laid off from his employment as a clerk. Hence, he is desperately looking for a new job to support his family. As such, he is easily lured into the business of organ harvesting as a donor, although without informing him fully what is going to happen with him. At the beginning of the play, Om has very little idea about the actual nature of his ‘job’ for which the Inter Planta Services has agreed to take care of his family and support them financially. Nonetheless, Om is not the only one who has been chosen as a donor. There are numerous other young men, rather young bodies that have been selected for the organ trade. All these bodies have been chosen without informing the ‘owners’ which part(s) of their bodies is/are going to be severed and *utilized*. Not that Om is unaware of this ambiguity, but then, he seems to have realized that his consent now does not matter to his employer. He is rather keen on keeping his ‘job’ a secret. Om’s wife Jaya who seems more practical than her husband, thinks that there is nothing to hide. She says with an air of matter-of-factness, “Everyone knows already! D’you think you’re the only one with this *job*? D’you think people don’t know what it means... when the guards come from the agency? All that remains to be known is which part of you been given away!” (Padmanabhan 201). Evidently, Jaya’s words hint at the appalling fact that people are somewhat aware of the existence of organ trafficking. Again, her words also point out the vagueness of the contract Om has signed and thus divulge the imprecision of the illegal organ trade. For Om, it is a precarious situation. He knows he is a donor but he does not know which part of his body he has to donate!

Harvest thus reveals how the unlawful organ market captures young people/bodies in crises and reduces them to mere commodities. Jaya is unable to accept the fact that her husband has literally sold himself to support his family. For her, Om’s decision is no less a nightmare. She screams in utter loss:

...He's sold the rights to his organs! His skin.His eyes.His arse. Sold them! Oh god, oh god! What's the meaning of this nightmare! (to OM) How can I hold your hand, touch your face, knowing that at any moment it might be snatched away from me and flung across the globe! If you were dead I could shave my head and break my bangles – but this? To be a widow by slow degrees? To mourn you piece by piece? Should I shave half my head? Break my bangles one at a time? (Padmanabhan 203)

Jaya's sense of loss leads to utter dejection and out of her shaken state of mind, she makes ironical comments that sum up her deplorable condition as well as her husband's disastrous future. She can sense that they will be "gutting him like a chicken" (Padmanabhan 203). And when Om reminds her of the contract that "one-third of all donors are left absolutely intact" (Padmanabhan203), Jaya again hurls her ironical banter: "And where does that leave you? Two thirds a man? Half a wit?" (Padmanabhan 203). Om's foreign employer has purchased the right to his whole body and accordingly, has the full right over his organs. It is, as if, Om's entire entity has been reduced to a mere site, a place for keeping and then supplying organs to the now rightful owner, that is, his 'employer' from America, who does not have enough of their own people to 'spare'. That is why Om's receiver, like others in the trade, has his eyes on the underprivileged people like Om. Virgil, the actual receiver, is rather a post-human body that seeks to live on and on with organs from human bodies, and he is somewhat successful in his attempt to attain immortality of some sort. And to accomplish his desire, he has been making use of his financial prowess and also muscle-power in the form of the Guards who are more machine-like creatures without any human feelings. They do not have any sort of compassion for Om and his family. Jaya knows that very well and justly evaluates their status: "They don't care about any of us, not as people, not as human beings" (Padmanabhan 229). Here, Jaya is referring to the guards as well as Ginni. When Om objects to this generalization and comments, "She really cares for us", Jaya, in her usual ironical repartee replies, "Oh yes, she *cares* - just as much as she cares about the chicken she eats for dinner" (Padmanabhan 229). The point that Jaya tries to make here is that the

apparent care Om and his family have been receiving from Inter Planta Services is nothing but an effort to ensure that their donor stays healthy and fit until organ transplantation is complete. That is why they are spending so much money. Nevertheless, Om is unable to figure that out:

OM: Would she spend so much money on me, then? If I am just-a – a chicken to her? Answer me that! Do you know how much she's spent on us?

JAYA: Never mind chicken – have you seen how their beef cattle live? Air conditioned! Individual potties! Music from loudspeakers - why, they even have their own psychiatrists! All to ensure that their meat, when it finally gets to Ginni's table, will be the freshest, purest, sanest, *happiest* - (Padmanabhan 230).

Jaya's reply not only mocks at Om's false perception about his employer but also reveals the gulf that exists between the people of the first world nation that behave like the colonizer and exploit the inhabitants of the third world country. Indeed, Om's body, his self and everything has been captured by the colonizer reducing him to nothing but a colonized subject who, in Jaya's view and rightly so, is nothing better than a chicken or a beef cattle nurtured carefully only to be slaughtered to get the best out of it. Om's condition is nothing better than that. He has been taken care of for two months now so that he keeps well enabling his organs to 'smile'. However, he has been taken care of not as a human being but merely as a body - a storehouse of organs. Jaya repeatedly lets Om know about his state of affairs. Presuming that the guards have arrived at the door to take Om away, Jaya mocks at Om, "It's been two months, you know! Time to collect their fattened broiler!" (Padmanabhan 231). Evidently, Jaya can recognise that for his receiver, Om is nothing better than a purchased commodity ready to be utilized at any moment. She realizes that neither Om nor she now has any control over the matter. It is, as if, Om is now not a man of flesh and blood but a body accommodating valuable organs to be delivered at the beck and call of the rightful authority who now hold its possession. Apart from Jaya, only Jeetu is able to surmise the consequences of what his brother has done by signing an agreement with the organ transplantation agency. However,

Jeetu, a struggling young man of seventeen, can only disapprove of his brother's decision until Ginni draws him into a visionary world of posthumanism. Quite interestingly, after building castles in the air regarding financial stability, Om comes back to reality all of a sudden. Assuming that the guards have come to fetch him for fulfilling the contract into which he entered, Om completely breaks down and realizes the hollowness of his plan to support his family at the cost of his body. He does not know the extent to which he has to perform the task of a donor. In utter disgust, he exclaims, "How could I have done this to myself? What sort of fool am I?" (Padmanabhan 232). Subsequently, in a frantic attempt to save himself, Om even sinks to the floor and tries to hide. His reaction is suggestive of a distressingly frightened state. Being a victim of the circumstances, he is completely disillusioned. But then, as Jaya confirms, Om has always been shy of facing hard times. Hence, his reaction does not surprise Jaya at all. She tells Om's mother, "It's so typical. He can't face things. He never could" (Padmanabhan 235). And again, "Look at your son, Ma! Look! He's been reduced to a cabbage!" (Padmanabhan 236). The way Jaya scorns at Om's fearfulness has also something to do with their unhappy conjugal life. Om has never been an ideal husband for Jaya who consequently has been inclined to Jeetu, Om's younger brother. Hence, Jaya's scornful words also come out of her dissatisfaction buried somewhere deep in her heart. However, this does not, in any way, mitigate Om's silence when the guards take Jeetu away mistaking him for Om. He rather feels relieved because the guards have taken Jeetu away and perhaps *used* him *up*:

OM: They've not realized that. They've used him instead of me.

JAYA: No! They can't be that stupid!

OM: You yourself said they don't give a damn about us - why should they care about him? (*he raises himself slowly*) No. They've used him, take my word for it. Or else they'd have brought him back by now - (Padmanabhan 242-43)

Indeed, they have used Jeetu up! They have robbed him of his eyes and returned him with a heavy bandage wrapped across his eyes and around his head. The transplant has thrown him into oblivion of darkness

- a place worse than death, “a bleached and pitted place. Scars and slashes against infinite blackness. No stillness, no dimensions. No here, no there” (Padmanabhan 248). Jaya tries to lift Jeetu from his stupor by providing him with some solace, but he is unable to cope up with what has happened to him and wishes to put an end to his suffering. Then, all of a sudden, a transformation takes place in him as soon as Ginni appears on the Contact Module. With the help of technology, Ginni is able to beam her video image straight into Jeetu’s mind. This enables him to see Ginni, even though he has lost his vision. This is where the play goes completely to a science-fictional world revealing posthumanist culture that is buzzing with cyberspace and cyborg instead of *homo sapiens*. The encounter between Ginni and Jeetu clearly reveals the fact that the former has appeared to convince the latter for the second phase of transplant and she is successful in her mission. Jeetu is completely swayed by the angelic beauty and appeal of Ginni and pledges to give her anything (read any part of his body) she wants. And when the guards come to get him, he goes with them willingly as if under a spell.

The second phase of transplant brings in the twist in the tale. After the Guards take Jeetu away for the second transplant, Padmanabhan introduces another technological device - a Video Couch which is at once a stage prop and a theatrical sign. With the introduction of this rather embellished device, the playwright again imports us to a fictitious posthumanist culture and reveals the problematics of post-Anthropocentrism. As a futuristic device, the Video Couch is filled with tubs, switches, circuitry, containers, and many other parts that even include “organic input interface – the hydration filter - the pangrometer” (Padmanabhan 258). It is presented as a fully automated video chamber, self-sufficient and capable of transporting one to an awe-inspiring posthuman state. After installing the Video Couch, the Agents quickly help Ma, Om’s mother, into it amidst her gasps and grunts and shut the lid, seal the edges and lock them. Jaya cannot but express her utter astonishment at this machine-human symbiosis -

JAYA: But- how will she breathe?

AGENT 1: Ma’am- it’s a total comfort unit, Ma’am -

JAYA: Won't she have to – to

AGENT 1: We have a full recycling and bio feed in processor! Your relative will have no further need of the outside world from now 'til - (*he coughs*) 'til she chooses to delink.

JAYA: Does she - how will she -

AGENT 1: Everything is now in the customer's operation, Ma'am – the unit is fully self-sufficient -

JAYA: Won't I have to switch it on or off? No food? No water?

AGENT 1: Total self-sufficiency, Ma'am! There is nothing to be done! (Padmanabhan 260)

The futuristic Video Couch does offer a kind of technological ambiguity with its “ten modes, seventeen frequencies, three substrate couplers, extrasensory feedback impulses and cross-net capturing facilities!” (Padmanabhan 258-59). Through this ‘self-sufficient’ machine, the playwright portrays a world of Artificial Intelligence functioning in the fabric of cyberspace. As demonstrated by Agent 1, the ‘Super Deluxe Video Couchmodel XL 5000’ comes with “all media access - satellite, biotenna, visitelly and radiogonad. Manual control panel, neuro-stimulator and full-body processing capacities - all other queries will be answered online from within the Video Couch self-training programme...” (Padmanabhan 259). As far as theatrical representation is concerned, this imaginative gadget can be incorporated on stage with a little effort (and expense). But from the point of view of dramaturgy, the introduction of this futuristic gadget can be both enthralling and estranging for the spectators. After all, this technologically advanced device gives a strong jerk to the very notion of (post)human existence in a posthumanist culture and underscores the insignificance of any human ‘body’ that may NOT be used as a site for organ harvesting. Om’s mother is sixty years old and hence she cannot be a prospective donor. Then what is the ‘use’ of such a ‘body’ to the organ harvesters? Evidently, she is completely ‘useless’ and hence she is figuratively sent to hibernation inside the Video Couch. On this count, since every stage prop is a potential signifier, the Video Couch may stand for a ‘bin’- a place where disposable objects are thrown. The fantastical Video Couch thus stresses how the human body

has become a mere disposable object in the posthuman condition. This very fact is further emphasized in the last scene (Act3.2) of the play where the action reaches its climax and leaves us dumbstruck. For the first time, we see the actual receiver on stage, however, not in person but ‘a version’ of him as he himself tells Jaya. Here, Manjula Padmanabhan has deftly presented the ramifications of ‘organ-piracy’ in the posthumanist fabric of the dystopian society. Once again, Padmanabhan uses the Contact Module as a stage prop to display Virgil, the actual receiver, who is nothing but a product of posthumanism and bio-power. What we see, what Jaya sees on the Contact Module is actually Jeetu’s ‘body’ but without his ‘self’. Virgil has purchased Jeetu’s ‘young body’ and got into it to live further. He admits to Jaya, “I am old and I was sick, until I got into this young body-” (Padmanabhan266). Having procured a young body to continue to exist, Virgil is now interested in Jaya and reveals - “We look for young men’s bodies to live in and young women’s bodies in which to sow their children” (Padmanabhan 267). Evidently, Virgil is not a human but an assemblage of ‘self’ and ‘body’. The self may belong to him, but the body belongs to someone else - a body that he has acquired through the human organ trade using his financial power and bio-prowess. He is a typical inhuman posthuman entity, a strong symbol of post-Anthropocentrism and bio-politics. In his conversation with Jaya, Virgil reveals how stubborn he is to live a life beyond death:

VIRGIL: We began to live longer and longer. And healthier each generation. And more demanding - soon there was competition between one generation and the next - old against young, parent against child. We older ones had the advantage of experience. We prevailed. But our victory was bitter. We secured paradise - at the cost of birds and flowers, bees and snakes! So we designed this programme. We support poorer sections of the world while gaining fresh bodies for ourselves.

JAYA: And it works? You live forever?

VIRGIL: Not everyone can take it. We fixed the car, but not the driver! I’m one of the stubborn ones. This is my fourth body in fifty years.

JAYA: Fourth!

VIRGIL: Two were not successful. It hasn't been easy, Zhaya. I won't hide that from you. But so long as I can afford to keep trying - I will! (Padmanabhan 267-68)

Virgil's statement unmistakably reveals how sections of the populace of financially and politically strong nations exploit the 'poorer sections of the world' in a bid to improve their own living condition. But more than that, Virgil's words lay bare the fact how, in a posthuman condition, human beings have been reduced to disposable bodies and robbed of their consciousness, their identity, their very being. Poor Jeetu now owns no 'body' but has only 'a casing' as Virgil informs Jaya. His body now belongs to Virgil, the receiver who exists, in his posthuman form, within Jeetu's 'body'. In his book *Posthumanism* (2014), Pramod K. Nayar aptly notes that organ transplantation tends to subvert the 'inter-human distinctions' of donor-recipient and also estrange the human self, or consciousness of one's body, from itself (88). Nayar here is referring to organ transplantation that has been possible due to the revolutionary advancement of medical science. In the case of Padmanabhan's *Harvest*, the politics of organ transplantation goes beyond to an imaginary world of science fiction where it assumes larger significance as it is no longer just organ-transplantation but 'organ-piracy' – a direct consequence of bio-politics. The "Contemporary capitalism is 'bio- political' in that it aims at controlling all that lives. It has already turned into a form of 'bio-piracy' (Shiva, 1997) because it exploits the generative powers of women, animals, plants, genes and cells" (Rosi 95). Virgil in *Harvest* is after this 'bio-piracy'. Having gained Jeetu's body, he is now desperate to exploit the generative powers of Jaya. But, on this occasion, he faces strong opposition; and finally, after raising significant questions about posthumanist culture, the play ends on a positive note with Jaya's utmost resistance to Virgil's overriding posthumanist hankering. Although posthumanist culture is rather fictional, the play, by presenting a glimpse of it, warns us about the catastrophic repercussion of 'bionic technology'. After all, as William S. Haney observes, "invasive posthuman technologies, most of which are as yet unrealized beyond the realm of science fiction", may ultimately induce" states of hyperarousal and a corresponding wear and tear on

human physiology that may lead to the kind of illness and injury among the many that it was intended to remedy among the few” (168–69).

Thus, set within Indian culture, Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Harvest* achieves universal significance as it addresses key questions and burning issues concerning illegal trading of human organs, bio-politics, posthumanist culture, exploitation of the underprivileged and so on. Moreover, *Harvest* can boast of being one of the earliest plays in the growing body of ‘posthuman drama’ and arguably the first-ever Indian English drama to incorporate the genre of science fiction on stage. Indeed, *Harvest* is a bold and innovative attempt, a futuristic and trend-setting endeavour. Having said that, it also needs to be admitted that a play finds its life, its fullest form when it reaches the theatre. A play is primarily meant for the stage. *Harvest* has not had a very prolific journey from the page to the stage. Two key reasons behind this could be the futuristic dramaturgy that the playwright has employed and the depiction of a posthumanist culture in a dystopian terrain. Maybe, the audience is yet to be prepared to witness such a dystopic posthumanist play; or maybe they are ready to watch, but the production houses/theatre groups are unable to feel the pulse of their audience; hence the hesitation in planning and executing more pulsating performances. Nevertheless, as already mentioned, the production cost may be another major factor behind fewer performances of *Harvest*. After all, the dramaturgy demands certain technological functionalities that may not be easily available to every playhouse since most of the theatre groups are finding it difficult to bear the ever-increasing production cost. But then, as Erin B. Mee has noted, *Harvest* has a science-fiction feel with the science fiction elements being “merely exaggerated versions of familiar things... The pseudo sci-fi set pieces are designed to heighten the surreal nature of Om’s gutted lifestyle” (270). This surreal effect can easily be gained through the experimental use of stage props and without much investment. This may seem a bit complicated, but certainly not impossible considering the necessity of the gadgets in the theatrical design of the play. Unmistakably, the manifestation of the surreal ambience is the quintessence of Padmanabhan’s futuristic dramaturgy in *Harvest*.

True that *Harvest* is yet to become a part of mainstream theatre in India. However, that does not take away anything from the play’s immense

contribution to Indian theatre as a whole. It has evidently set a new trend with its thematic concerns and innovative dramaturgy. Although set in the Indian milieu, the play addresses issues that go beyond the geographical and cultural boundaries of India to what we now know as the ‘glocal’ world. The playwright states, “The play is about the human condition in general rather than the specific condition of being Indian” (184). As noted by Mee, this marks an important shift in Indian theatre as playwrights have shifted from ‘the theatre of roots’ to focus on global issues, “writers and directors are no longer speaking to the world about their region or country... they are speaking to the world about global issues from their particular perspective...” (268). Since the play was sent to the international competition sponsored by the Alexander S. Onassis Foundation for a new, unpublished, unperformed play, Padmanabhan could have easily used non-Indian context in her play. But she chose Indian characters and context and her decision to write an ‘Indian’ play with its focus on a global issue was deliberate – “I wanted to use the traffic in human organs to make a universal point about use and abuse between people and cultures” (Padmanabhan 184). The result is a stunningly fresh and pristine play, a critique of the commoditization of the human body in the intricate fabric of posthumanism – something hitherto unattempted in the rich and glorious tradition of Indian drama and theatre.

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Mahesh Dattani's *Where There's a Will*: Patriarchy Revisited

Bidisha Munshi

Where There's a Will is the first dramatic endeavour of Mahesh Dattani as a playwright. Like all successful social comedies this amusing and thought-provoking play seeks to unmask the harsh reality of our social existence. It examines a system called patriarchy. From the sociological point of view patriarchy can be defined as follows:

Patriarchy denotes a social structure where the actions and ideas of men are dominant over those of women. This circumstance of male dominance is reflected in correlative inequities throughout the society, the foremost being in the family domain where the father or eldest male is considered the patriarch or 'head of the household'. Patriarchal societies have customs or laws, where wives and children in a family are owned by the father or nearest male relative. Patriarchies are patrilineal where descent and inheritance is reckoned through the male line. Upon marriage, the wife's family name is changed to that of her husband or the family name of the husband is added to the name of the wife, while the husband's name remains unchanged. Similarly, children are given the family name of their father. (Soman 253)

Thus, in this asymmetrical structure men enjoy extreme power and importance. Here the gender of a person determines his or her place and role in the society. Dattani's play throws light on the oppressed and subservient position of the women and their varied responses to the said mechanism. In 'A Note on the Play' of *Where There's a Will* Sita Raina comments:

Where There's a Will has several interesting aspects. Mahesh described it as the exorcism of the patriarchal code. Women—be it daughter-in-law, wife or mistress—are dependent on men and this

play shows what happens when they are pushed to the edge.
(Dattani 451)

In the Indian context this comic representation of the authoritative patriarchal dominance gains a specific significance because, the social life of this country is, as we all know, governed by such a mechanism where male supremacy is all pervasive and ultimate. Women have to play the role of a subordinate class perfectly. However, today's modern Indian women are struggling hard to expand their periphery beyond the patriarchy ordained home and family, as well as to assert their independent individual entity. But this struggle gets much more complicated because of the rigidity of the age-old, conventional mental set up of this society and its basic units, i.e., their own families. Moreover, power, money and authority distort the vision of the so-called rulers to such an extent that they fail to show any respect to others' feelings, concerns or opinions. These issues have been dealt with superb dramatic skills and honest sensibility in this play.

This play focuses on Hasmukh Mehta, a business tycoon and his home, to be more precise, how he runs his home, rather how he wants to run his home. To him his home is not different from his office, that is, he holds the supreme position in both the places. He is so intoxicated by the idea of himself as the absolute custodian of power and authority that he designs to control the lives of his family members, that is, his wife Sonal, son Ajit and daughter-in-law Preeti even after his death through his will. Here the dramatist has Hasmukh Mehta on stage after his death, visible to the audience only, to witness the consequences of his own action or to make him realise how futile and farcical his attempts were to play God in others' lives.

Hasmukh Mehta epitomises a hard-core patriarch who is powerful, self-complacent, out-and-out dominating, crusty and, of course too much "proud of his achievements" (Dattani 472). His wife Sonal observes: "He thinks he is the king of all he surveys! And we are his subjects." (Dattani 472) His professional career is quite successful. He runs his father's business impressively. He had to join the business at an early age giving up his school education. In fact, he was compelled to be involved in the

money-making business at the insistence of his father who, threatened by his elder son's desertion of home, refused to allow his younger son any room for such distractions. Thus, the rigorous, mundane and harsh life has made him a tough, pragmatic and gritty businessman who is so much obsessed by his own power that he designs to control the lives of his family members even after his death through a "special will" (Dattani 479). At the end of Act I Hasmukh Mehta dies but Dattani introduces his ghost on stage after his death, and this twist enables him not only to provide a commentary but to explore the characters' psyche also. At the same time this play registers the transition of the characters' mental make-up resulting from the after-effect of the execution of Hasmukh Mehta's will. According to the will Hasmukh's son Ajit has to wait for another twenty-one years, till his being forty-five years old to be the owner of his father's property. Till then the property will be supervised by Hasmukh Mehta Charitable Trust. The most shocking fact for the family members is that the trustee of this trust is Mrs. Kiran Javeri, a marketing executive turned company director and Hasmukh Mehta's mistress whose existence has been unknown to them. She has the authority to run the Mehta group of industries on behalf of Ajit Mehta and to take any decision for the well-being of the business. All family members find themselves in an extremely frustrating situation because of the will. Ajit feels his father has deprived him of his own rights. "AJIT (*groaning also*). He has ruined us! The old man has taken us for a nice ride." (Dattani 480) Sonal, Hasmukh Mehta's wife reacts sharply: "SONAL. . .If I'd known he had a mistress, I would have left him." (Dattani 481) Preeti, Hasmukh's daughter-in-law holds her husband to be responsible for the suffering she has to undergo because of not getting the property. "PREETI. . .If you [Ajit] had been nicer, all this wouldn't have happened." (Dattani 481)

The situation gets more complicated when Mrs. Kiran Javeri comes to live with Hasmukh's family according to the will's terms. And with her arrival a transition in everyone's life is beginning to take place. Her presence in the Mehta house helps all its members see themselves in a new light. Through Kiran's character Dattani portrays a new woman who comes to know life in its true colours, fights back all adverse

situations with her sharp intelligence, great confidence and indomitable will power. Most importantly, she knows well what she wants from life and does not hesitate to declare that without any pretence. And at the same time, she does not lose her innate human qualities and it directs her to develop a meaningful association with everyone from the Mehta family. Hasmukh Mehta has been unsuccessful in creating such a connection with his own family because of his infatuation with money and power. However, Kiran employs money and power to build up a worthwhile relationship with the Mehta family, and the bonding among the family members becomes stronger in the process. She suffers from no ambiguity in her mind regarding her relationship with Hasmukh Mehta. Hasmukh wanted a safe means to satiate his sexual desire and Kiran wanted money desperately because the hardships of her life taught her the importance of money for a respectable living. But to her money is a means, not an end in itself. She is mature enough to recognize the weakness of Hasmukh's character: "KIRAN. Hasmukh was intoxicated with his power. He thought he was invincible. That he could rule from his grave by making this will." (Dattani 508)

Moreover, Kiran is perfectly aware of the most conspicuous absurdity of Hasmukh's personality. On one hand he believes in his ultimate authority over everything he owns, even over others' lives, and surprisingly, on the other hand, he himself does not possess a life of his own: "KIRAN. Hasmukh Mehta was living his life in his father's shadow." (Dattani 509) The life Hasmukh led was conceptualised by his father's aspirations. She identifies Hasmukh as a weak man with "false strength" (Dattani 508). She compares him with her drunkard father who sought to dominate his wife and family by physical violence to camouflage his inability to free himself from the influence of alcohol. She observes Hasmukh's impotence as a complete as well as mature human being:

KIRAN. He depended on me for everything. He thought he was the decision maker. But I was. He wanted me to run his life. Like his father had. *(Pause.)* Hasmukh didn't really want a mistress. He wanted a father. He saw in me a woman who would father him! *(Laughs. Hasmukh cringes at her laughter.)* Men never really grow up! (Dattani 510)

Kiran's encounter with life reminds us of Simone de Beauvoir's wonderful observation that she made in her eminent book *The Second Sex* of the experience of the independent women in a male-dominated society:

The advantage man enjoys, which makes itself felt from his childhood, is that his vocation as a human being in no way runs counter to his destiny as a male. Through the identification of phallus and transcendence, it turns out that his social and spiritual successes endow him with virile prestige. He is not divided. Whereas it is required of woman that in order to realize her femininity she must renounce her claims as sovereign subject. It is this conflict that especially marks the situation of the emancipated woman. She refuses to confine herself to her role as female, because she will not accept mutilation; but it would also be a mutilation to repudiate her sex. Man is a human being with sexuality; woman is a complete individual, equal to the male, only if she too is a human being with sexuality. To renounce her femininity is to renounce a part of her humanity. (Beauvoir 643)

However, Kiran uses her femininity to advance in social life. In other words, she objectifies herself to achieve success in her professional life. She explains it to Sonal: "KIRAN. Mrs. Mehta, no woman has an affair with an older man, especially a married man, for a little bit of respect and trust. It was mainly for the money." (Dattani 506) In this connection Kate Millett's evaluation of the position of educated women in patriarchy can be quoted:

The female is continually obliged to seek survival or advancement through the approval of males as those who hold power. She may do this either through appeasement or through the exchange of her sexuality for support and status. As the history of patriarchal culture and the representations of herself within all levels of its cultural media, past and present, have a devastating effect upon her self image, she is customarily deprived of any but the most trivial sources of dignity or self-respect. (Millett 54)

Thus, Kiran also exploits her own sexuality to achieve success in life. Even her marriage was "arranged" (Dattani 491) by Has Mukh Mehta for

his convenience. Kiran explains Hasmukh's desire to rule over his family after his death as a consequence of his living under his father's leverage. Here, too, he follows his father's footprints. In fact, the mechanism of patriarchy can be interpreted in this way. The head of the family, i.e., the father enjoys enormous power to control his family. He dominates his home according to his will, ideas, desires as well as dogmas. Gradually, other members of the family like his wife and children, male and female both begin to follow their husband and father as well as his thoughts and beliefs. And interestingly enough, most of his principles are inherited from his forefathers, not of his own.

Hasmukh Mehta is such a staunch follower who lives his father's dreams, aspirations, ideas, ideals. And he does not even realise it. Therefore, he never feels the necessity of finding his own self, his own mind, his own life. Ajit, however, does not suffer from such an illusion. Instead of living in his father's shadow he wants to create an identity of his own: "KIRAN. He may not be the greatest rebel on earth, but at least he is free of his father's beliefs." (Dattani 510) This is the prime reason for the conflict between the father and his son. As a typical patriarch he wants his son to epitomise his own image. Therefore, he seeks to "season" (Dattani 460) Ajit. To Ajit his father is "a pompous fool" (Dattani 461), a "thick-skinned buffalo" (Dattani 461), who wants to play "Big Boss" (Dattani 460) through his son. He sees in his father a threat which will drain his individual spirit from him. He is in search of his own self and tries to resist his father: "AJIT. And what becomes of me? The real me. I mean, if I am you, then where am I?" (Dattani 461)

Hasmukh blames his wife Sonal for her way to bring her son up. He thinks his wife treats Ajit not as a grown-up man but as a baby. Thus, she fails to build up a strong and forceful character in him. In fact, Hasmukh Mehta considers his wife Sonal Mehta to be incompetent in every aspect of life—an incompetent wife, an incompetent mother, an incompetent human being. Hasmukh and Sonal are an ill-matched couple who do not share love, affection or respect for each other. Hasmukh does not hesitate to brand his marriage "the greatest tragedy" (Dattani 464) of his life. She is a "good-for-nothing" (Dattani 472), like a piece of "mud" (Dattani 473) in her husband's eyes. She is a pathetic character

with comic undertones. She tries hard to take care of her husband's health lest the doctors and most importantly her sister Minal would blame her for the deterioration of his health. Her constant anxiety to play the role of a caring housewife seems not to be directed by her love and affection for her husband but by her concern about what others think of her. However, her affection towards her son Ajit is really genuine. She knows that Ajit does not fulfil Hasmukh's ambition or desire. But she does not bother. In fact, she is proud of her son. She knows Hasmukh is dissatisfied with her too. As a married couple we never witness any expression of mutual love or respect or understanding in them. Hasmukh thinks men marry not because of the need for companionship but because of the need for a son who will carry forward his name and work after his death. Naturally love, respect, loyalty or understanding does not have much importance in his idea of marriage.

According to Hasmukh Mehta Sonal is a failure as a wife because she is intellectually inferior and, moreover, she is insufficient to provide her husband sexual gratification. Hasmukh comments shamelessly and bluntly, without any sense of guilt:

HASMUKH...Twenty-five years of marriage and I don't think she has ever enjoyed sex. Twenty-five years of marriage and I haven't enjoyed sex with her. So what does a man do? You tell me. I started eating out. Well, I had the money. I could afford to eat in fancy places. And what about my sex life? Well, I could afford that too. Those expensive ladies of the night in fivestar hotels! (Dattani 473)

Thus, women are considered nothing but the instruments of his pleasure. His comparison of sex with food and his pride of the ability to satisfy the physical need identify him to be an insensible, disloyal as well as debased representative of patriarchy. Eva Figes explains how patriarchal domination determines the submissive role of women in the sexual act:

... the sexual act is inextricably bound up with the idea of submission
... Man's trouble has always been to make the submission appear total enough, particularly in the bedchamber, because he demanded a slavish obedience devoid of sensuality.... Closer examination always reveals that female rights amount to the right to have

children and the right to get what she wants by making herself particularly amiable to her husband, which is of course a very convenient arrangement as far as husbands are concerned. (Figs 27, 30)

Sonal fails miserably in this business of “making herself particularly amiable to her husband”. Therefore, she does not possess any significant position in his life. However, in the play we can see Sonal facing so many problems in managing her house, particularly in cooking in the absence of the cook, the Maharaj. She cannot find the switch panel or her German knife set or the teflon coated nonstick pan and blames the cook with stealing. She gets tired and faints, but insists on making parathas for Ajit. Sonal does not have any sense of proportion; she makes food greater in quantity and rich in quality. She is much influenced by her sister Minal, in fact, her own existence is overshadowed by Minal’s predominance. However, after Kiran’s arrival at Mehta house Sonal’s transition is really remarkable. With Kiran’s assistance Sonal becomes aware of the reality and finally comes out of Minal’s influence.

Hasmukh wanted to plant Kiran at his house to make his wife realise her own inadequacy, to “keep a check on” (Dattani 496) Preeti, his crafty daughter-in-law so that she may not find any “loophole” (Dattani 496) in the will, and to compel Ajit to follow his father’s scheme in running the companies. But what actually happens after Kiran’s entry at his house is quite different. She acts as a catalyst in bringing sanity in the Mehta house. Sonal and Kiran share their opinions about Hasmukh Mehta. They discover in him a man who is obsessed with the idea of ruling others’ lives, but whose own life is ruled by his father’s shadow. “KIRAN. Where were his own dreams? His own thoughts? Whatever he did was planned for him by his father. (Dattani 509) And Sonal agrees. “SONAL. At times he even sounded like his father. So crude and loud.” (Dattani 509) Kiran and Sonal develop a bonding based on mutual understanding and affection. And their bonding breaks the stereotypical roles of the mistress and wife assigned to them by patriarchy. Both of them have been dominated by Hasmukh Mehta all their life and he has been insensitive to their needs altogether. He was an out and out self-centred person, least bothered about others’ feelings. When he did not

find his marital relationship with Sonal sexual insufficient he goes to Kiran, marries her to a drunkard which serves to continue their relationship. Their association mocks Hasmukh's so-called full-proof plan to dominate his family after his leaving the world. Dr. Beena Agarwal observes rightly:

The union of Kiran and Sonal, a collective force born out of the long annals of exploitation and suffering, is an effort to abolish sexual colonialism. Their collective voice is a declaration of woman emancipation against the 'will' of Hasmukh. (114)

In the beginning of the play Hasmukh introduces his daughter-in-law and Ajit's wife Preeti as "Pretty, charming, graceful and sly as a snake" (Dattani 456) and he is not wrong in his assessment of her character. She has married Ajit because of his financial background. In fact, in every single footstep she is guided solely by the idea of monetary gain. She was very well-behaved with all during her father-in-law's lifetime. But after his death her attitude has undergone a sea-change. She does not hesitate to talk harshly to her husband or mother-in-law. She shouts at her husband: "PREETI...A mistake? You are a mistake! You are a big mistake in my life!" (Dattani 499) Kiran finds something uncanny in her desperate longing for money:

PREETI (*rises*). I see nothing bad in desiring something that'll naturally be mine in course of time.

KIRAN. Yes. But to desire it with such . . . passion! Don't you see anything wrong in that? (Dattani 492)

Preeti accuses Ajit for the will because she feels he has not shown enough obedience and loyalty towards his father. And this assumption is quite right. Thus Preeti is proved to be a money-minded, sly as well as hypocrite woman. At the same time, towards the end of the play, Kiran discovers Preeti's role in Hasmukh's death. She has exchanged Hasmukh's tablets controlling his blood pressure with her vitamins. And this has hastened the process of Hasmukh's death. Preeti's character with its dark shades exemplifies Dattani's unconventional vision of womanhood. He does not conceptualise women as idealised creatures symbolising pure and innocent virtues of life. He draws them as he sees them. To him women are endowed with both virtues and vices, like men. And

Preeti's extreme materialistic concerns, selfishness, self-centeredness, craftiness, wickedness—all identify her as a woman, rather a human being of today's world where money and power are regarded as two of the most important tools to rise to the social ladder.

Mahesh Dattani's *Where There's a Will* satirises a grim reality of our Indian patriarchal society through a comic caricature. Like all authoritative systems patriarchy has its serious drawbacks. It represses individual free thoughts which can challenge its predominance. Naturally women have to suffer from inequality, discrimination as well as subordination due to this prejudiced system. However, this play not only draws a true picture of patriarchal domination in the framework of a family but hints at an alternative of this system also towards the end. The ghost of Hasmukh Mehta epitomises the spirit of patriarchy. And now he is gradually fading away losing his relevance in the lives of those people whom he has designed to rule even after his earthly existence is over:

HASMUKH. . . I don't think I can enter this house. It isn't mine . . . any more. . . They are not my family any more. I wish I had never interfered with their lives. They look quite happy together. With Kiran sitting in my place. (Dattani 515)

Kiran takes Hasmukh's place in his family through her goodwill, sensibility, sensitivity, affectionate nature and above all, through a deep understanding of life. Instead of the domination of authoritative patriarchy Dattani wants these positive qualities to be the ruling principle of this society. At the end of the play the interpersonal relationships among the members of the Mehta family become stronger. Kiran's intervention has helped them come out of the stifling influence of "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell 76) epitomised by Hasmukh Mehta and explore themselves as well as others. The bonding of Kiran and Sonal dispels the myth of the typical antagonistic relationship between the mistress and the wife. Both of them represent the oppressed section of the society, i.e., women. It seems that they see each other as women only, and nothing else. Their effort to see the true face of their exploitation and the denial of carrying the burden of the patriarchal code enable them to overcome the difficult situation that their lives have placed them in. If a family is considered to

be the microcosm of society, the transformation of the Mehta household seems to suggest an effective strategy through which the present hierarchical patriarchal structure can be confronted. And the strategy involves breaking the patriarchal code by the marginalised sections of the society and thus, in creating the resistance to their exploitation.

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Bravely Fought The Queen—A Play of Performance

Sangeeta Mondal

Abstract

This paper focuses on the various kinds of performances in Mahesh Dattani's drama *Bravely Fought the Queen*. Mahesh Dattani employs various kinds of performances like dance, music, poetry, bodily gestures etc. to ventilate their emotional conflicts. Women in the play lead lives outlined by patriarchy and try their best to comply to them. The play talks of pretence, a performance that women carry out in their daily lives, pretending to be what they are not. Naina Devi, Rani of Jhansi and Subhadra Kumari Chauhan—Dattani represents three women in the play who do not appear on stage but are connected to the women who actually appear onstage. All these women share a history of patriarchal domination. Performances play a crucial role in exposing the psyche of a character in a drama.

Keywords:

Naina Devi, Rani of Jhansi, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, performance, patriarchy, courage.

Introduction:

“Your thinking today determines your performance today.”

—Zig Ziglar

This paper focuses on the various kinds of performances in Mahesh Dattani's drama *Bravely Fought the Queen*. Mahesh Dattani uses various kinds of performances like dance, music, poetry, bodily gestures etc. to bring out the essence of this drama. He occupies a very distinct and illustrious place in the realm of Indian drama in English. He has manifested

his individuality in many ways. His presentation of problems from real life situations is a significant contribution to Indian English Drama. Among modern Indian playwrights, he stands forth with singular distinctness, striking artistic perception, and immense dramatic guts. He takes up serious problems prevailing in urban India and gives voice to the problems and sufferings of the marginalized people of our society. His plays contain important elements like human pathos, passions, conflict and appeal to human sentiment, which can immediately touch and stir the common audience. Various social issues like homosexuality, lesbianism, incest, gender discrimination, religious faith etc. are dealt with in his plays. Moreover his plays are a portrayal of male-dominated society run by male-oriented laws and customs where the females are either made to establish their identity or succumb to their destiny.

Bravely Fought the Queen truly summarizes the underlying issues of the Trivedi family, where women are coerced or conditioned to arrest their emotional and mental development. *Bravely Fought the Queen* throws light on the pretension of identity and exploitation of women at the hands of both men and women and their resistance. The play also exposes issues of extramarital relationship and homosexuality. In this drama we see how the characters take the help of performances like music, dance and poetry to ventilate their emotional conflicts. On the one hand music and dance give the characters self-liberation; on the other hand poetry defines the courage and revolt of the main protagonist of the drama. Women in the play lead lives outlined by patriarchy and try their best to comply to them. The play talks of pretence, a performance that women carry out in their daily lives, pretending to be what they are not. The play brings in this idea of appearance versus reality in the conversation between Dolly and Lalitha.

Dolly: I'm sorry. I wanted to laugh but I was afraid.

Lalitha: Afraid?

Dolly: Afraid I would crack my mask (Dattani 4).

Dolly is seen as wearing a mud mask. The "mask" in the play is symbolic of performance as a way of life which women take resort to

live in the patriarchal society. Here Dolly is performing the role of a contented middle-class wife and an infallible mother.

Music in this drama appears in the form of Naina Devi's thumri. Naina Devi or Nilina Sen (1917–1993) who was born in the family of Keshab Chandra Sen, nationalist leader and social reformer and was married at a very young age to Maharaj Ripjit Singh of Kapurthala. The legendary exponent of thumri couldn't sing after marriage because there was an objection to women from good families practising this art as thumri was traditionally sung by tawaifs. It is being played in the background as an action which creates a sharp contrast between an empowered example of womanhood and the instances of debilitation where the female is effectively silenced. It also reminds us of Dolly and Alka's mother who too had "tried to be a singer, when she was young". Baa, was also a gifted singer but her tyrannical husband forbade her to sing in public. On the contrary, although Naina Devi was a queen, her husband supported her in her pursuit to sing thumri, exclusively sung by tawaifs. When the thumri is played on the stereo, Dolly tells Lalitha about this "queen of thumris" who had dared to "sing love songs sung by whores", even though she was occasionally mistaken for one herself. Thumris were sung in *mahfil*- a private gathering of the connoisseurs in a nobleman's house or courtesan's salon, to attract men and women and gain customers- but Naina Devi was bold enough to continue singing. Naina Devi's daughter Rena Ripjit Singh says, "I never heard my mother sing at Chapslee [their family home], not even a low hum. We had heard that she had a beautiful voice, but none of us heard it here." [The Indian Express]

Likewise, we learn from Dolly that their mother was fond of singing:

"Our mother was...tried to be a singer. When she was young. We never heard her sing" (79).

This is an echo of what Rena Ripjit Singh says about her mother. Even Baa mentions that she would sing to her husband but she was not allowed to sing publicly:

"He asked me before marrying him if I will sing! He knew that I could sing! You want me to sing only for you? ...I will sing for everyone! Why are you so angry?" (69).

In a paper titled “Women in Traditional Media,” presented in 1991 at a consultation in Bangalore, Naina Devi had said, “There was no question of a rani singing, even for her own pleasure. I sang to myself when I was alone in my room.” Naina Devi could sing in public only after the death of her husband but she had to shift to New Delhi in order to protect the dignity of her in-laws.

Naina Devi’s *thumri* is heard all through the play *Bravely Fought the Queen*. It has multi-layered significance. The *thumri* is a symbolic expression of Dolly’s longing for a sensuous relationship with her husband Jiten who is insensitive towards her. The *thumris* offer assistance to her to fantasize about Kanhaiya, who is non-existent and an imaginary creation of Dolly’s brain. Her sources of sustenance are the *thumris* and illusory Kanhaiya. Kanhaiya is an imaginative character through whom she reveals her sexual desires. Dolly imagines Kanhaiya, the grandson of the toothless cook, as she listens to the soulful renditions of Naina Devi. Dolly has a secret liaison with Kanhaiya or Krishna, the symbol of love fulfilment, like Radha’s unceasingly youthful lover in Indian mythology who is forever available to his devotees at whatever point she wills his presence. So the women in the play listen to music celebrating love and, at the same time, agonize its very absence in their lives.

Dolly tunes in to Naina Devi’s *thumris* when she is depressed as they are melancholic interpretations and presents her crave for an erotic relationship with her husband. The *thumri* is a song whose theme is yearning for Krishna, the divine lover. The songs are sung in Braj Bhasa, which is a literary form of Hindi. While listening to the *thumris*, she dreams about Kanhaiya because she cannot embrace her husband Jiten as they do not lead a normal conjugal life. Another reason for her tuning in to Naina Devi is because her husband was very supportive in what she did unlike Dolly’s husband.

Naina Devi’s story reminds Lalitha of a poem by Subhadra Kumari Chauhan as “Khoob ladi mardani woh to Jhansiwali Rani thi...” The poem is about a queen, a war-hero, Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi some lines of which had run “we’d heard her praises sung so often,/ So bravely fought the Rani of Jhansi./ So bravely fought the manly queen. Alka

while referring to the song asks Dolly if she was brave enough to qualify as a man? Because the quality of bravery is also manly in a patriarchal society. So was she brave enough to qualify as a man? Subhadra Kumari Chauhan's poem 'Jhansi ki Rani' (1930) is the most iconic representation of the Rani's life.. The poem charts the progression of the Rani's life from a young girl to a warrior fighting for the rights of her people juxtaposing it with the nationalist movement. Chauhan describes 'the spear, the shield, the sword and the knife' [Barchi, Dhal, Kirpan, Katari] as the Rani's 'childhood friends'. Trained in the stories of the brave Shivaji, [Veer Shivaji ki gaathayen uski yaad zabaani thi], the Rani is both an avatar of the goddesses of war [Lakshmi thi ya Durga thi who swayan veerta ki avatar] and the brave daughter of the Marathas. However, she is 'mardaani' or manly because she clearly forfeits her femininity when she fights a battle valiantly.

The title of *Bravely Fought the Queen* is taken from Subhadra Kumari Chauhan's epic poem "Jhansi ki Rani". The most rehashed line in the poem "Khub ladi mardaani woh toh Jhansi wali Rani thi...(Bravely fought the manly queen)" has been appropriated by Dattani as the title. The name Rani of Jhansi invokes an ironic parallel to the women in the play who are inactive, powerless victims of male oppression. Rani Lakshmi Bai, the Queen of Jhansi, led her army against the British in 1857 when The East India Company denied acknowledgement to the adopted prince, and annexed the kingdom employing the Doctrine of Lapse policy. Rani of Jhansi has always been celebrated as a freedom fighter leading her army against the British forces. She fought against the British single-handedly and preferred to die rather than succumb to their demands. Like the Rani of Jhansi, Dolly is a courageous fighter who is undermined by male oppression but Dolly cannot challenge. She sleeps in the rain and her senses become active when she sees Alka dancing in the rain. Earlier acts presented Dolly as a tormented character but in the final act she turned out to be a rebel, a strong and confident woman who fights against the injustice done to her.

The poet Subhadra Kumari Chauhan was the first woman Satyagrahi who was arrested in 1923 when she was just eighteen and pregnant. She along with her husband went to jail leaving her three children behind

under the care of her eldest daughter, Sudha. While in prison, she gave birth to a physically challenged baby and named her Mamta. She nurtured her to the most possible extent in the bleak conditions of the jail. But when she got the news of denial of food to ‘C’ class prisoners, she rushed to help them, notwithstanding the fact that this might be a punishable offence for her, and can create troublesome conditions for her and for her daughter as well. Dattani thus brings in two very courageous women who revolted against the stereotypical representations of femininity to fight against oppression— one does it in the absence of her husband and another in the presence of her husband. So the resistance is either sanctioned by patriarchal authority or in the total absence of it.

We find Alka dancing in the rain when the raga of the rains “Megha Mallar” is being played on the stereo. Her impulsive desire to dance and get wet in the rain has been triggered off in the mind of Alka when she was drunken, by her sister’s teasing earlier in Act III:

Alka: Is it raining?

Dolly: Yes! Come look

Alka: Why?

Dolly: Because you like the rain!

Alka: Do I?

Dolly: Of course you do. You love getting wet and having your sari cling to you... And you love doing a filmi number in the rain.

Alka: No, I don’t.

Dolly: (*laughs*) I was just teasing you.

Alka: (*gets up, looking a little dazed*) I think the last drink really got.
(73)

Alka is thirsty for sensuous love from her homosexual husband. When she is depressed, she turns to alcohol, over-done make up and filmy dance numbers and imagines herself to be a film-heroine in transparent saree and blouse. The dance is a far cry from the erotic or aesthetic subtleties integral to a *thumri* mahfil, a celebration of her self-

hood. Alka's dance is an erotic spectacle, an expression of her unrecognized feelings. This dance of Alka signifies the sense of freedom from the shackles of society. She seems to be fighting back, with an imaginary sword swinging in her hand for all that she has suffered. Her thirst for freedom and mobility from constant confinement in the house is seen in her dance.

Alka's dressing up as Rani of Jhansi with a tin plate armour is a performance that can be equated to the Rani as stripping her feminine weaknesses and donning militant masculinity by picking a sword and plunging it into a sheath at her waist. This act of Alka suggests that even if she aspires to be as brave as Rani of Jhansi, it would mean giving up on her femininity, her humility, modesty, breaking the code of silence imposed by patriarchal norms and she is not bold enough to break these codes. Rather she prefers to fight a mock battle with a tin plate armour, something which would not disturb the carefully ordered patriarchal universe. Rani of Jhansi has been vigorously celebrated as a model of valour, she is exceptional as she is 'mardani' or a masculine woman, the honorary man who is one of the models of Indian womanhood. As an Indian woman who came out of the private space to rebel against the British, she posed an interminable problem of representation and comprehension. Rani of Jhansi had to be relocated in the framework of selfless service and sacrifice as a grieving mother and widow. The women in the play are thus fighting their battles in their own way. What is significant is nobody appears to be 'brave enough to qualify as a man'.

For Dolly, the expression of freedom has a different form of dance. She performs the incoordinated hand and neck movement with her eyes dilating in an unusual way, without any musical accompaniment, imitating her spastic child. This abnormal dance movement is a way of exploding the social stigma of vulnerability and gaining a critical consciousness to stand up to the deforming norms of patriarchal society. Towards the end of the play it is Dolly who protests against domestic violence and makes movements with her hands while dancing like a spastic child.

Conclusion

If Naina Devi's *thumnis* played over and over again evoke and comment on the yearning for love and fulfilment experienced by all the characters in the play, Rani of Jhansi and Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, are the two women who give the play its name and share a common history of protest against patriarchal delimitation and definition of gender roles. Dattani thus represents three women in the play who do not appear on stage but are connected to the women through their performances who actually appear on stage. All these women share a history of patriarchal domination. Thus it may be concluded that various kinds of performances play an important role in exposing the psyche of a character in a drama. In particular, dance and music have been found to be very effective in therapeutic rehabilitation of trauma-ridden survivors who have suffered psychological abuse and a breach of familial love and trust. These forms of performances in drama offers a glimpse of the liberated self and a mode of expressing one's inner suppressed thoughts and emotions. In *Bravely Fought the Queen*, these performances help to build spaces of dissent, where the woman ceases to desire security and approval, and show the courage to stand alone and reach farther and in the words of Gerda Lerner, the courage which "asserts to itself the right to reorder the world".

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Power Play in the early Family Plays of Mahesh Dattani:

Shirshendu Basu

In their book chapter “The Challenge of Defining ‘Family’” published in the volume *The State of Family: Law, Power and the Meaning of relationships*, Lynn H. Turner and Richard West have observed that:

Most of the time when we think of the meaning of family, we think of the social and emotional experiences of family as they relate to us as individuals. Our sense of emotional, social and material support is intimately woven into our sense of what family should mean. For good or bad, family comprises of relationships that are more intimate emotionally powerful and enduring than our connections. Family relationships are long lasting from birth onward and even when alienated from family members we still speak of them as family. We participate in a widening number of activities with family members than with others – eating, sleeping, travelling, illness, fighting and family members are most often with whom we shape milestones in our lives. And typically, we experience a wider range of emotions with family members than anyone else. No one can make us more angry, happy, or can hurt us more than our family.

(Turner and West, 1)

This is not only a comprehensive answer to the question ‘What is a family?’ but it also recognizes that families are social institutions within which power operates. For as Turner and West show, parents often have near-absolute power over their children when the latter are young, even as balance of power may shift as and when they grow up into adults themselves and start their own families in which their parents may live as members, dependent or otherwise. In many cases power inside families is due to either economic factors, or emotional or sentimental feelings,

or the hierarchy of age or birth, or on issues of gender, or on duties and obligations as prescribed by law or society, etc. But it is only infrequently that scholars working in the field of power-studies have taken notice of what may be called the operation of power or power-play within families. This paper will try to look at just this factor in some of the early dramatic writings of Mahesh Dattani, the preeminent Indian playwright who first came into prominence within and outside our country in the 1990s.

Over the years, and particularly with the inclusion of a number of Dattani's plays in the syllabuses of a great many Colleges and Universities in India, there has been a considerable amount of critical writing published on the plays of Mahesh Dattani. However, little critical attention seems to have been paid to the issue of domestic power within the *oeuvre* of this playwright. Most critics who have examined such early family plays of Dattani like *Where There's a Will*, *Dance Like a Man* and *Tara* which are some of the principal plays within this category, have not paid sufficient attention to this. Commentators have instead concentrated on the so-called 'invisible issues' related to issues of gender and sexual orientation, etc. To provide a few examples, one may cite Dipti Agrawal's opinion that in *Where There's a Will*, "the focus is on the issues like gender discrimination and the domination of the patriarchal authority." (Agrawal 335) Another critic, Beena Agrawal has observed that the play *Tara* is "basically related with the issue of gender bias." (Agrawal 77) About *Dance Like a Man* Bipin kumar Parmar has observed that "The playwright shows us how the autocratic father tries to check the movements and manners of his son-in-law (sic) although the father is considered as a man of progressive ideas and liberal views". (Parmar 55)

Critics indeed seem to notice principally the social issues which are present in the plays of Dattani and to pay little attention to the ideological concerns that lie deeper inside the texts. In this context a remark of the playwright himself is important to notice. Dattani himself once confessed that he himself had not been conscious of the ideological undercurrents present in his first drama *Where There's a Will*. "I considered *Where There's a Will* frivolous in the beginning," he said in an interview given to the British theatre director Erin B. Mee. "Only later, after other people

pointed out the political ideology in the play, I realized it wasn't a frivolous play," he said. (Mee 158). The principal ideological feature that will be scrutinized in this paper is that of power as it functions within family relationships. However, it needs to be noted that as this is a kind of power that is functional only on what can be termed a 'micro level'. In other words, it cannot be studied in terms of the prevalent larger sociological understandings of power. Hence, the ideas of the important major theorist Michel Foucault who has written about what he calls "a new 'economy' of power, that is to say, procedures which allowed the effects of power to circulate in a manner at once continuous, uninterrupted, adapted, and 'individualized' through the entire social body," (Foucault 61) may not perhaps be applicable to a consideration of power-play within families. Rather, it would perhaps be more meaningful to keep in mind the observations of sociologists like John R.P. French and Bertram Raven who have to offer a much more micro-systemic model of family power. According to these two theorists, there are a specific number of what may be called bases of power that are operational within families. These bases include Legitimate Power, Informational Power, Referential Power, Coercive Power, Expert Power and Reward Power. These classes or types of power may reveal how the play of power is represented by Dattani as existing within the upper-middle class Indian families which are depicted by him in his plays.

Legitimate Power is the kind of power that is maintained by socially sanctioned systems of belief. For example the idea that the father in a family has authority over all other family members and has the final say in family matters because he is the head of the household, is an example of Legitimate Power. Informational Power refers to the possession of some specific knowledge which others in a family do not know. For instance, if it is only the head of the household who knows how much money he has, the other members of his family will not have the power to question his financial decisions. Referential Power is all about emotional likes and dislikes of each individual in a family towards other family members, sentiment and feelings. If a powerful family head shows preferential treatment and exercises his power in a differential way by allowing or stopping someone in his family in doing or getting something,

this is his or her display of Referential Power. Coercive Power indicates the use of threats or even physical violence. This kind of power is exercised on the comparatively weaker other, often with the manifest purpose of a showing off or of a consolidation of power. Expert Power proceeds from the expertise, usually professional, of any person inside the family. For instance, someone who has an expertise in any field may put this to use and influence a decision in a family by asserting his special knowledge. And finally Reward Power is explained as the use of the ability to change behaviour by providing rewards to those who comply with the wishes of the user of this kind of power.

Mahesh Dattani was never a student of Sociology, but as an expert playwright possessing an acute insight into human behaviour, he was aware about the play of power extant within Indian upper-middle class families in particular. Hence in play after play he depicted familial relationships in which different power equations exist and manifest themselves. Often these equations of power shape the storylines of the plays, animate their plots and make realistic the characters in them. For instance, Dattani's first play, the comedy *Where There's a Will*, is centrally concerned with a shift in the balance of power within the family of a Gujarati man. The protagonist here is a rich businessman, a garment tycoon by the name of Hasmukh Mehta, and all the action takes place in the house where he lives with his family. The family itself comprises of his wife Sonal, his son Ajit and his daughter-in-law Preeti. Hasmukh is however disappointed and irritated with everyone at home. His wife Sonal he regards as an inconsequential nagging presence who will feed him only on salad and not allow him to consume the halwa that he craves. He knows too that his daughter-in-law has her eyes on acquiring his wealth after his death, and he realizes that her polite behaviour to him and his wife is just a sham. But Hasmukh is most frustrated with his son whom he sees as a brainless dolt incapable of even assisting him in his business affairs. He knows too that his son is likely to side with his wife and not with him in any domestic argument.

But *Where There's a Will* is no ordinary social drama. The temporal performance space in this drama straddles the past as well as the present. We see this as Dattani evokes the personality of both Hasmukh Mehta's

long dead father and that of the protagonist Hasmukh himself in the shape of his on-stage ghost even after his own death in the first Act. As we can gauge from Hasmukh's reminiscences of his father, the latter had been a powerful authoritarian figure within his own family. He had seen to it that the young Hasmukh had discontinued his studies at a young age and had joined him in his business. The son too had never dreamt of disobeying his father. This lesson in the authoritative use of power over an offspring is what Hasmukh too attempted to replicate in his dealings with Ajit, his own son. The result however had not been as he had expected, as his son had refused to obey him and had even argued back and vocally protested against his father's behaviour on occasion. Nevertheless, Hasmukh Mehta during the course of his life had acted as a powerful patriarchal force. Behind his bossing over of his wife and son, there had been the operation of what has been described above as Legitimate Power, the force of public opinion. Just as Hasmukh's father had social sanction for behaving like a heavy father, he too had felt that it was socially expected of him to model his son on his own nature and personality. Additionally, the father lays claim to other forms of power like Informational Power, Referential Power, Expertise Power and even Coercive Power. As only he knows how much he earns and how much money he possesses, Hasmukh Mehta can use his wealth as a tool to manipulate the surviving members of his family through the will he leaves behind after his death. When he had been alive, the way in which he had abused his son for using the telephone and his refusal to install a second phone had been indicational of his Coercive Power. This kind of power is manifested even more explicitly in his action of slapping his adult married son in a fit of rage.

Most commentators on *Where There's a Will* have rightly taken note of the fact that the power which is the real concern to the dramatist is that of patriarchy. Subir Dhar in an early critical appraisal of the play that was first published two decades back has stressed that what Dattani's comedy reveals is how "patriarchal men invariably fail to exist as true human beings." (Dhar 207) Later critics have concurred with this view. Abhinava Chatterjee for example has read the play as one in which "Dattani takes up the issues of the patriarchal code." (Chatterjee 2)

However what the story unfolded in the play indicates is not the triumph of the patriarchal force but its defeat. This comes about as the will left behind by Hasmukh Mehta produces a result that he had not expected it to bring about. In his will, Hasmukh had stipulated that no one in his family would be allowed to inherit his wealth after his death. Instead, all his money and property would be held in a Trust to be managed by his former employee, a woman by the name of Kiran Jhaveri who had also been his mistress. In an exercise of his powers of Referential, Coercive, and Reward orders, Hasmukh had laid down certain specifications. His wife was to be given a monthly allowance for running the family and for her personal maintenance; his son would have to attend office on all working days from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.; and – most humiliating for everyone – Kiran his former mistress would be the sole Trustee, would assume the role of the head of the household and even live in the family and stay in Hasmukh's bedroom and train the son Ajit in how to run the business. It is only after twenty three years that the Trust would be dissolved and the family members could inherit and enjoy Hasmukh's assets.

Hasmukh may have thought that he had devised a foolproof plan to continue to repress and subordinate his son, wife, and daughter-in-law even after his demise. But what he had not planned for was the rout of his power through the agency of mutual respect, understanding and sympathy resident in the hearts of his family members. Indeed, after an initial awkwardness and hesitancy over Kiran's entry into the household, even Sonal begins to bond with her husband's former mistress over their mutual understanding that for all Hasmukh's posturing about being a powerful male, he had been in reality a weak man who had lived his entire life under the domination of his father. Kiran's words in this context are very important:

I should have hated him. Like I should have hated my father, my brothers and my husband. But all I felt for him was pity. ... Even his attempts at ruling over you after his death through his will are pathetic. The only reason he wanted to do that is because his father had ruled over his own family. All his life he was being a good boy to his father. (Dattani 501)

Also important is the dialogue of Sonal which follows the above:

How little I knew him. If I had understood him when he was alive,
I would have died laughing. (Dattani 501)

Kiran's words refer to the ill behaviour she and her mother had been subjected to by her father who used to come back each night drunk and beat up his wife and terrorize his children. Her father's behaviour had been symptomatic of what has been defined as toxic masculinity (Lindsay, Sexton, Ford), a compulsive male behavioural trait that is associated with harmful or socially maladaptive actions directed against women in particular. And as Kiran acknowledges, her own brothers have the habit of inflicting similar torture on their own wives also. Hasmukh Mehta's sexual liberties taken not only with foreign prostitutes in five star hotels in the past but also with Kiran had clearly been part of his urge to display his power and to dominate over women. Only, the play shows that the 'hard power' of Hasmukh is neutralized by the 'soft power' of the affective emotions of understanding, sympathy and compassion displayed by Kiran Jhaveri in particular. In fact, the domestic power of Hasmukh Mehta is effectively usurped by Kiran who takes over the reins of the family. Not that Hasmukh's power had gone unchallenged when he had been alive. His son Ajit had protested against his father's dictatorial ways and his daughter-in-law Preeti had sought to eliminate her father-in-law's power by pushing him towards a premature death. Other power equations within the Mehta family are instanced by Ajit's siding with his mother over small domestic power struggles between Hasmukh and Sonal manifested over what should be eaten for dinner, and by Preeti's angry outburst against her husband's past behaviour. But the conclusion of the play makes the most telling point about familial power. This is that rivalry, the desire to possess wealth, power or authority over others, the compulsion to dominate etc. are not conducive to family happiness. The ghost of the deceased Hasmukh Mehta learns this regretfully at the end as he sees the family sitting down to a convivial dinner and a decision is taken to cut down the tamarind tree from which the Ghost had loved to hang upside down.

Power over the lives of other family members wielded by a powerful patriarch is the subject of Dattani's second play *Dance Like a Man* also. Here we are introduced to three generations of a rich and well-known

family comprising of Amritlal the father, Jairaj the son, Ratna the daughter-in-law, and Lata the daughter of Ratna and Jairaj. The action of the play spans three time zones, the mid 1950s, the 1990s and an unspecified time a few years after this. In the first time zone the old father Amritlal is shown to be a respected former freedom fighter known for his liberal opinions. Ironically enough though, while he is willing to accept his son's choice of a bride who is an aspiring dancer, his professions to liberality does not extend to an acceptance of his son's desire to be a dancer. His reasons are that society looks down on men who take up dancing as a profession as this is a womanly activity, that he will be dishonoured in the eyes of society for having a dancer as his son, and he himself thinks that no man who can dance is masculine enough. Being a rich man who holds the purse strings in the family and as the sole livelihood support for his son and his daughter-in-law, he uses Referential power, Coercive power and Reward power to impose his will upon his family members. The only occasion in which his son tries to assert his own power against his father is when he impulsively decides to leave his father's home and protection and seek shelter in the house of an uncle of his wife. This protest however turns out to be abortive as the uncle had exercised his own coercive power and had stipulated that the couple would be supported by him only in exchange of sexual favours received by him from his niece. Compelled to return home, Jairaj and Ratna had to submit to the power of the father. Amritlal had wished to turn his son away from his passion for dance and so had told his daughter-in-law that she would have his support in becoming a renowned dancer only on the condition that she would sabotage her husband's chances in becoming a good dancer himself.

The consequences of this plan of action had been tragic. Neglected and deprived of his wife's support in his ambition in becoming a great dancer, Jairaj had turned to drinking from frustration. His son whom he had hoped to train into becoming a great dancer had died as a baby, and he had been subsequently transformed into a powerless inconsequential figure inside his own family. The real figure of authority in the family consequently became Ratna who as a successful dancer herself had taken on the responsibility of launching the career of her daughter Lata

as a dancer. This is an instance of the operation of Expert power. However and more significantly, Lata's success as a debutant dancer indicated by the reviews of her maiden performance brews jealousy in the mind of her mother. Ratna does feel happy that the performance of her daughter has attracted praise, but she regards it also as a threat to her own sense of being a powerful dancer herself. And above all in the play there is the recognition of the role of financial or economic power in the creation of imbalances within families. Lives are destroyed or flourished due to the possession of wealth which is regarded as a source of power. And this is to be seen not only in the fates of Jairaj and Lata but also in case of their son-in-law who it is stressed has an extremely rich father himself.

Dattani's third play was *Tara*. Here the play of power within an Indian family revolves around the familiar axes of power deriving from position, status or wealth. But what is different about *Tara* is that here the victims of Referential power are two helpless new born babies, a boy (Chandan) and a girl (Tara) who had been born as conjoined twins. The man of power who is no longer alive when the events in the play unfold, is a rich and powerful politician whose daughter had married a man from another community. The father used to have a definitive say in the affairs of his daughter's family, and when his grandchildren had needed an operation to separate them, he had been the one to decide to which of the infants the third leg which had been common to both the babies should be allotted. Despite medical advice that the third leg should be given to the girl child since it had a greater chance of survival there, Dr. Thakkar the chief surgeon performing the operation had been bribed by the grandfather to leave it on the body of the male baby. The reason behind this was a biased preference for a male offspring over a female one, and also a desire for having a 'normal' boy with two legs. For performing the operation, Dr. Thakkar had been rewarded by the politician-grandfather with a large plot of land on which to build a nursing home for doing this act, unethical in medical practice, of favouring a male over a female baby. But ironically enough the leg had been rejected by the boy's system within a couple of days and it ultimately had to be amputated, resulting in both children remaining single-legged and handicapped for the rest of their lives.

But it was not only the children who had suffered from this exertion of power manifested by the grandfather. Patel, the father of the children had been kept in the dark and had not been informed about this matter. And their mother Bharati had been left emotionally scarred for life burdened with a sense of guilt for having been responsible for causing the physical disability of her daughter. This made her not only to overreact with a show of love, affection and concern for the girl child Tara, but had turned her into a woman with a psychological and mental problem. Again, if the mother had manifested Reward power towards Tara, her husband was inclined to display a similar kind of power in so far as his son was concerned. This is brought out in the play when the question arises about the higher education of the two children. Patel is adamant that Chandan should join college immediately but that Tara should miss a year for having a kidney transplant done before going to college. But their mother says about this that their father “is more worried about your (Chandan’s) career than hers” (Tara’s). (348) There is also a tussle over power between the husband and the wife. At one point, Patel the husband tells that his wife Bharati had derived power from her father’s money. “Your father’s wealth has always been your strength against me,” (344) he says. But there is another occasion in the play when Patel displays brute physical force over his wife. A stage-direction indicates this: “*Patel goes to her and slaps her.*” But as the same stage-direction adds, “*The moment she recovers, she looks at him with some triumph.*” (345) This reaction of Bharati to her husband’s use of coercive power is interesting, for it is Bharati who is indicated to have ultimately triumphed in this duel over power. There is an on-going power struggle within the family, then, in *Tara*. At its centre are the children over whom Patel and Bharati contest. The shadow of the power of the grandfather continues to touch the lives of everyone in the family even as the visionary ending to the play shows the laying of the ghost of power with Chandan (or Dan as he calls himself as an adult in London), asking for forgiveness from his twin sister for having forgotten her. As Dan remembers that he had once “shared a body ...[and] one comfortable womb” (379-80) with his now dead sister, and as the final stage action shows the brother and sister embracing as completely whole human beings without their deformities,

Dattani indicates the power of love to transcend all limitations and imbalances in family power.

As a playwright, Mahesh Dattani was a realist. He was interested in depicting the familial and social circumstances in which countless ordinary Indian men and women live their lives. Hence the issue of power which he seems to have been interested in was never overtly political or even sociological but rather of a personal dimension. Sometimes as in *Where There's a Will* the tussle over power between family members is given a comic treatment. But occasionally as in the two subsequent plays *Dance Like a Man* and *Tara*, the depiction is more dark and tragic. Nevertheless it is also important to note that Dattani's vision is not one of despair. All the three plays discussed above have positive endings. In the first the ghost of power is shown to have exited the Mehta family as all its members join together at the dinner table not with a sense of rivalry or contestation but with a feeling of amity and togetherness. At the end of the second play too we are offered a dream scene in which the old dancers become young again and join together in a performance symbolic of familial harmony. And finally in the third play there is a visionary conclusion enacted in which the ills and damages of the past, all consequences of the human will to manifest self-power over others, are shown to have been removed and past scars healed.

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**“Is this the anticipation of Fascism?” :
Revisiting Utpal Dutt’s *The Nightmare City***

Naren Mondal

The play *Duswapner Nagari* (*Nightmare City*) was first performed in Bengali on 16th May 1974 at Kalamandir by People’s Little Theatre. It was first published in the Oct-Dec 1979, and Jan-Feb 1980 issue of the *Epic Theatre* and was later translated into English by Utpal Dutt himself.

Utpal Dutt’s flair for comedy and his acumen for acting the villain in both Bengali and Hindi films by this time had brought him enough fame and popularity. Yet his heart lay in serious theatre—in the issues that were close to his heart—protest against oppression, giving a voice to the subaltern, overthrowing the tyrant, sometimes by the most vulnerable and marginalised member of the community—the woman, ill-used and neglected in theatre.

The play *The Nightmare City* is a living document of the tyranny of the government collaborating with the police, money-lenders, businessmen, and political leaders. The cast and crew of this play were attacked brutally and various conspiracies brewed to prevent its performance. On 26th August 1974 PLT was going to perform *Nightmare City* at The Star Theatre, but ruffians attacked the members of the PLT group even in the presence of the armed police force. They could not perform the play that day. This incident provoked all the theatre lovers, intellectuals, and the media into a huge protest. On 11th September 1974, *Desh* says “Is this the anticipation of Fascism? If it is so, then why cry for democracy?” (Mukhopadhyay 159). On 14 September 1974, *Blitz* wrote, “The land of Nightmares is a pure piece of fiction and has nothing to do with Utpal Dutt’s play ‘Duswapner Nagari’ which was not permitted to be staged in Calcutta by hooligans because it attacked the ruling party establishment”

(Mukhopadhyay 159). Arup Mukhopadhyay also writes that many people including Mrinal Sen, Samar Sen, Tarun Majumder, Mohit Chatteropadhyay, Soumitra Chatteropadhyay, Bibhash Chakraborty on 30th August 1974 met in a remonstrance congress against that incident (160). Utpal Dutt in his magazine *Epic Theatre* writes that he and Badal Sarkar, Mrinal Sen, Tapas Sen, Mohit Chatteropadhyay, Ashok Mukhopadhyay and others also went to meet the Chief Minister of West Bengal Mr Siddharthasankar Roy to inform him in writing about the barbarity perpetrated on the theatre members on 26th August 1974. But to their great astonishment, they found that he went on supporting the barbaric activity saying “If you use the stage as a political platform, a section of the mass can rise against that political propaganda” (Mukhopadhyay 160). The police accused Utpal Dutt and PLT under IPC 124(A) for writing and producing *Duswapner Nagari* allegedly committing a crime against the state for attacking the capitalist class, the police, and the ruling party in his play. Satya Bandyopadhyay, a member of PLT, in his book *Utpal Dutt and His Theatre*, writes how all the theatre activists voiced their demands for the freedom of the theatre. They wondered if the law of crime against the state was used in such allegations where would the people find democracy; it would then mean that protesting against the price hike of essential commodities was a crime against the state (82)! Bandyopadhyay also writes that the themes of Dutt’s plays always have initiated conflict and debates. One of the major characteristics of his themes is to expose the ways of the ruling class through which it tries to maintain its views undermining the opinions of the common mass (83). By doing so, Dutt tries to form a mass movement against the ways of the ruling class, to get rid of their suppression, physical and psychological.

This paper will try to locate the situations and the ideological positions of the upper class ‘bourgeois’ and try to analyse how they always deceive the common mass. The play *Duswapner Nagari* shows how the big businessman, the political leader, the police, and the media, who talk about development, socialism, equality in broad daylight, gang up for their profit. Lakshman Palit is representative of the businessman class, who with the power of money controls everyone, Mriganku Roy, Chief of Police, Gobindo Chatterjee, the Editor of a newspaper called the

‘Voice of Bengal’ and, Chinmoy Goswami, a youth leader of the ruling party. Goswami, a political leader of the ruling party, says that the party wants to develop society, so they launch different welfare programmes.

Goswami: Today, our party launches its programme of birth control by vasectomy, operating on the male species to deprive him of the ability to produce children.

Roy: You mean the males of the great submerged classes?

Goswami: Naturally. (*Three Plays* 227)

So they initiate the policies for the mass, but they exclude themselves from that policy, distinctly showing the difference in the class they belong to. To cope up with the food scarcity in the state, the ruling party starts campaigning that they will search the stores. This is also a policy taken by the ruling party to showcase that they care for the improvement of the social situation of the common mass.

Palit: It is true that the ruling party has seized some food, but do not imagine that has inconvenienced us. Damn this cigar, it's bitter. You do not understand. Their campaign against the black market was necessary for the black marketeers. To disarm the people, if nothing else. (*Three Plays* 232)

Lakshman Palit has started a newspaper ‘The Voice of Bengal’ so that they can circulate news or ideas which they want to. He knows, for sure, that in a state the media has a great role to play. Media is a great weapon to control the ideology of the common mass. And they circulate whatever news they like to control the discourses.

Palit: A photographer... has taken a picture of our great leader at Dum Dum airport. The leader was on his way to London. The photo must go on Page One tomorrow.

Chatterjee: I don't think our readers look at photos of leaders.

Palit: But it must be printed all the same. He threatens to investigate my taxes... Egad, which is the plane and which is the great leader?

Kinkar: Really sir! Why, here is the leader plainly visible.

Palit: If that is the leader, why has he wings?

Chatterjee: If you ask me, this is the leader. No, it isn't. It's one of the watermelons that grow profusely beside our airport.

Palit: How now photographer? I didn't know our leader had grown wings.

Kinkar: Then that must be the plane. (*Three Plays* 236)

This is how they try to reach the people with false news and get their enemies out of the line. With money and force, they control everything. When it becomes a bit difficult to find the leader in the photograph, there comes the inevitable threat:

Chatterjee: Young man, let me warn you, unless you provide us with a proper photographic representation of our great leader, which must be at least reasonably similar to him, you will be out in the streets by noontime today (*Three Plays* 237-38).

On the other hand, the government even justifies the situation in the state. The radio news is very significant in this context.

Radio (voiceover): Although India is facing a severe shortage of food, we ask—is there freedom of the individual in China. Although prices in India have risen somewhat sharply of late, we ask —is there democracy in China? Although electricity in India is temporarily in short supply, we ask — are there free elections in China? Although — (*Three Plays* 239-40)

Mr Palit always tries to move the focus towards something else and then under that he executes his evil intentions. He always talks of the China invasion and their spies and tries to curb the opposing Communist members who oppose his capitalist ideology.

Goswami: Are you suggesting China is about to land paratroopers in Calcutta?

Palit: Such are their intentions, but without doubt they will fail. Tomorrow our newspaper will carry a banner headline: Chinese Mass Troopers Along Northern Border! Beware of Chinese Agents Inside Country! These informative captions will be followed by an exclusive report on the machinations of the Chinese army in Sikkim.

Chatterjee: There is certainly an Indian army in Sikkim, but there are no reports of a Chinese one.

Palit: No reports?

Chatterjee: None, sir.

Palit: No Chinese in Sikkim? Now that's a disaster. If you want to have a shaft up the Commies' backs, you just need the Chinese on the border. Why are they not rattling sabres? Look, look along the border. Surely you can dig up a flat-nose somewhere?

Chatterjee: There is nothing there. I have been looking.

Palit: I feel positively betrayed. I have millions at stake here, and they suddenly preach peace like damned monks! It's hard, hard to bear...I am cooked. Twenty million down the drain. I am hurt by this breach of etiquette. But I never give up. Mr Chatterjee, go to Sikkim.

Chatterjee: To Sikkim?

Palit: To Sikkim, if you know what's good for you.

Chatterjee: For how long? It's so sudden.

Palit: I do not imply physical importation. By 'go to Sikkim' I mean send thy mind thither by meditation where the unholy Chinese have gathered. Our Sikkim correspondent never visits Sikkim. He sits at his table and writes. (*Three Plays* 240-41)

This is how the disruptive forces in the state deal with what seems harmful to their business. The capitalists do not care for the truth and as they have power and money they formulate their truth which they continuously feed the common mass forcefully until that lie becomes truth to them. This is how the government campaigns for democracy and freedom of speech and the individual, but the reality is somewhat different. The protesting voice is sharply choked by the government. Mr Palit has used this situation of the state to great effect, by brainwashing poor people like Moni, Sagar and others. He pays them and uses them as murderers when they are unable to stop anything that is against them:

Palit: . . . Listen, Moni, I was going through the books and suddenly discovered you owe me 3,000 rupees. You will no doubt recall you drew the sum as the price of Anupam's life... But I wouldn't mind writing it off. The money is yours. On top of it, I add 7,000. Total: 10,000. Here is 5,000 as advance. Cash.

Moni: What's all this?

Palit: You—shall we say—honorarium. Tomorrow night, you will enter these parts of the city (*pointing through the window*) screaming, 'Long Live Mao Zedong', and, with all the deftness you are known for, stab the first policeman you see. The night after, you will come again, this time yelling the glories of the Marxist leader JyotiBasu, and toss a bomb into the local office of the Congress. This will set the stage, as it were, for a Shakespearean Act, Scene One, with everybody whispering the inequities of Resurgent Red terror. You will then re-enter the zone previously indicated, and, screaming, 'Red Salute to Naxalbari', assassinate the Communist, Swapan.

Moni: You mean I should kill, policemen, Congressmen and Communists with absolute impartiality? . . . But this affair looks fishy to me. The Chief of Police does not seem to object to the murder of a constable. That's not neutral

Roy: The particular policeman who will be on duty there tomorrow night—one Modak by name—is the secretary of the policemen's union, an obnoxious person who has given us many a sleepless night with his incessant demands for higher wages and bonus.

Moni: And when I'm supposed to bomb the Congress local, how is it that this Congress boss sits here and calmly approves?

Goswami: The local secretary belongs to a different faction, hostile to mine. (*Three Plays 250-51*)

This play was written in 1974. But before that, the years 1967-69 was the time for the rise of the Naxalite movement. There was a huge upheaval during the 70s in Bengal. The Congress government tried to wipe out this revolution by applying full force. Police, C.R.P.F and army everything was applied to kill the Naxal members. The government made

this an opportunity to blame the CPI (M) and the Naxal members for all the lawlessness in the state. And they murdered all the leaders of one group blaming it on the opposite group. This was a period of rampant killings, of whoever became a possible threat to their interest and ideology.

Moni, in this context, is a very important character. He is educated. He has passed the B.A. and had the situation of the state been better, he could have been a professor. He is inflicted with guilt feeling after the murder of a person called Anupam Sarkar. He has lost his identity, his dreams are shattered. His idea of the world has changed. The introduction of his character, in the beginning, reveals it all:

Moni: I have lost my name along with hope. I am Moni, alias the Cat, alias the Face, alias . . . Lord Krishna had 108 names, and I bet he never remembered all of them. What is my name? Moni Bhusan Mitra. Really? This was my name? Moni Bhusan Mitra, B.A.! (Dutt, *Three Plays* 225)

Now, he wants to get rid of the dark world. And decides not to kill anyone, but he knows that it is not an easy task. He turns against these people. He is split into two personalities. He talks to himself. He cannot forget the romantic ideas, he had of this world. All these together make his character a complex one. His soliloquy in the garage shows the complex nature of his character. Moni just stands out as the representative of the youth of that time through whom we get an insight into the reality of the young educated generation that was going through the same complex and complicated situations in society. He is but an outcome of the bitter conflicts into which the capitalists and the government have led the country. There is hope and Moni finds it in Purnima. He loves her and hopes to lead a peaceful life with her. He thinks it is only Purnima who can get him out of his 'psychological sickness' if it can be called so. He speaks to Purnima of how these people took advantage of his situation:

Conscience: This man had heroic ideas. He is an anachronist. He held up a bank with a toy pistol because he could not stomach the idea of starving, though as an Indian, starving should have been no problem to him. He dodged the police for seven days, just seven

days, and was caught in the bath, all naked and wet. Always was a clean man. Then they took him to the secret police for questioning. He was still heroic because he wasn't like the bums who take up gangsterism as a profession. He could read. He had read of Surya Sen and Julius Fuchik who never sang when tortured. They poured water over him and a burst of electricity into his penis. Then they drove an iron truncheon up his rectum until only the handle showed. Finally, the officer just grabbed a Colt 45 and, dispensing with modern subtleties, began methodically to bash his head. Whereupon he consented. He went out and killed a Red, so the police wouldn't press armed robbery charges. He was no hero anymore. Then they said, 'Kill a second Red, or we'll hang you for killing the first.' Then, 'Kill a third, or you'll swing for the second.' Et cetera. The hero is gone. Behold a walking Colt 45.

Moni: You see the trap I was in. Not easy to break out. But now I will. . . . (*Three Plays* 270-71).

Thus Moni tries to break out of their trap. He wants to live like a free man, wants to create his own identity. He has his reasons to fight but in that, he is somewhat linked to Swapan and Mustapha, as their target enemy is the same. But in this fight, Purnima Bose, the secretary to Mr Palit, has a very significant role to play. On one hand, she is the inspiration of Moni and on the other hand, we find her in confrontation with Mr Palit and others. Moni in his utmost mental agony seeks a way of relief through Purnima. He takes the money for killing the Communists Swapan and Mustapha, but he helps them escape. Swapan and Mustapha are the persons who are on the other hand fighting for equality in society. They are fighting against the ruling class and the businessman class.

In Moni's conversation with his other self Devdutt, Moni reveals that "in the history of revolution it has been seen that the ruling class always uses the chiefs, dacoits, murderers, unemployed, and the tramps for their interests against the revolution, against the mass" (*Natak Samagra* (VI) 140). This is what happens here in this play too. Firstly they use Moni against the Communists and other common people for their interest. Then when Moni turns against them, they use Sagar, his assistant, against him to arrest him. On the other side, there are the likes of Swapan and

Mustapha and other factory workers who gather in the city to fight against these 'bourgeois' capitalists and the government-controlled by them. Krishnachura Babu calls for a revolution to uproot these corrupt people and the businessmen who use the police to torture the mass for their interest, who tortures if people ask for food.

The play thus seems like a parable of/for modern times, paradigmatic of the ills that beset it and distressfully mirror a civilization gone corrupt and the only way out is overthrowing the agency of state machinery and terrorism.

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A Study of the Representation of Folk in Theatre and Performances of Birbhum: A Subaltern Perspective

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Abstract

Theatre in Birbhum, since its inception, remained in cultural schizophrenia, a hybrid of colonial and local versions of theatre. The theatre groups imitated the Calcutta theatres and built stages to emulate the proscenium convention. Departing from the regional tradition or the folk inheritance, theatre in this mufossil district emulated mainly celebrated prevalent Western trends, a tendency altered from the indigenous theatre of Bengal. In the preceding decades after 1970, several playwrights, directors, actors and designers of Birbhum have begun groping for a new vocabulary, idiom, styles and forms in their region. Exploring this new impetus in Birbhum's theatre, the study inspects the indigenous texture of some of the renowned folk plays in Birbhum. There have been few systematic endeavours to examine the role of theatre in the regions to acquaint with the subaltern perspective. The study here is precisely an attempt to solicit the issues of 'subalternity' or 'politics of the people' in these plays.

The word 'subaltern' is derived from Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, which categorises non-elite or subjugated social groups. In postcolonial context, it relates to someone who has been marginalised or rendered voiceless. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a postcolonial and feminist critic, designated downtrodden, oppressed sections of the society as 'Subaltern'. Spivak labels 'subalternity' as "The social groups and elements included in this category represent the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the 'elite'" (Spivak 24). The rural folk forms associated with

marginalised communities in Birbhum are fast disappearing, and the folk artists are living in abject poverty. Again, due to competitive market forces, globalisation, and deteriorating socio-economic conditions, the young generation is not pursuing these traditional performing arts. We can consider them as subaltern in this regard. As identity markers of regional culture, they must be incorporated as part of the mainstream theatre practice. As a result, they can be recognised as the central subject of performance culture rather than marginal other. Modern theatre in Birbhum until the 1970s didn't look to the rich heritage of folk cultures and ethnic base of the inhabitants of this *Rarh* region, something that was a blunder as admitted by Birbhum's theatre activists and playwrights. The attempt to go back to the ethnic roots through modern theatre was manifested in the drama *Jhumur* by Anan, which was first performed in 1972. '*Jhumur*' is a traditional type of folk performing art of the Santhals (in the accompaniment of song and dance). Santhals being the earliest inhabitants living in the linguistic regions of Birbhum, introduced this folk performing art in the villages of this district. Often the performers would organise the *jhumur* as a *pala* or *yatra*, presenting specific episodes from "Vaishnava Padabali", playing the roles of Radha, Krishna and Barui. The predominance of Vaishnava *Krishnayatra* and *palakirtan* made it popular in Birbhum as a *lokonatyā* or folk play and were equated with *Kirtan* (another Vaishnava folk performing art). But unfortunately, with time, *jhumur* artists had disappeared from Birbhum, submitted to the popularity of *Baul* and *Kirtan* as mainstream folk entertainment. *Jhumur* is one of the most successful productions of Anan (a group theatre, Suri) that highlights the skill of a fuller in a village who will challenge and defeat a veteran female *Jhumur* artist that will lead to their marriage at the end. This play is now performed by *Natyatirtha* (a group theatre of Ahmedpur) that still retains massive feedback from the spectators. Sailesh Guha Niyogi, the playwright, has incorporated many *jhumur* songs and attempts to present the whole picture of a *jhumur* performance, especially *Jhumur Larai* in a village fair. The duo of father Biharilal and daughter Radhabala is a rare combination of two generations of *jhumur* artists in this play. Radhabala is recognised for defeating many popular *jhumur* artists through her witty arguments and intellect. Mainly *jhumur* is performed with the singing and dancing by the women accompanied by musical instruments

played by male artists. Gradually, the participation of women in the dance started to be prohibited; they had been replaced by the male performers only. Undoubtedly, the play *Jhumur* dismantles two stereotypes—firstly, that women in villages cannot be leading artists. Secondly, that a female artist cannot compete with a male artist. But Radhabala fails to continue her agency as ultimately she gets defeated by Madan in *jhumur larai* and marries him. So, the play fails to denounce the patriarchal convictions—firstly, that an intelligent man always ends as a winner against a woman and secondly, a maiden woman always chases after an intelligent man for marriage. Spivak specifies the issue of gendered subalternity in her essay, setting her discourse in postcolonial society. According to her, among all the subalterns, women are at the most challenging state of marginalization—“If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow...” (Spivak 28).

Jalpari is a play written by Anupam Dutta which was first performed by Ekhani (a group theatre of Suri) in 1987. Under the direction of Rajo Saha, the play is designed with plenty of folk elements as the playwright has incorporated a ‘*Letto*’ performance directly on stage, exploring the art form and the life of the artists. According to researcher Md. Ayub Hossain, this rural form of dramatic songs evolved from the ancient Indian folk theatre. This popular drama in the villages of Birbhum would be performed throughout the night during village fairs. The art form was a part of their life; the songs have folk flavour since they worked in the fields. Two *letto* groups would compete against each other in a specific *pala* to win silver medals from the *jaminders* (Hossain 84). Considering this kind of humorous regional *pala* as a folk performing art, Subal Das bemoans the crisis that the *letto* performers face to recover this traditional art from extinction. Mr Hossain considers the abolished *jamindari* system and modern education mainly responsible for ruining these traditional folk performing arts (85). In this play, Harakumar Gupta’s “Sri Durga Letto Asar” is the only *letto* group in Birbhum district. Gadai, Jaga and their team vows to renew or remould this dying folk performing art in Majurhati village—“লেটো লোকশিল্প, মরে যেছে, তাকে আবার জাগানো চাই। তার গরন গঠন কে লতুন করে দিখা চাই।” “*Letto lokshilpa, more jechhe, takhe abar jagano*

chai. tar garan gathanke latun kore dikha chai” (Dutta 107) [My translation: Letto is a folk-art, it is dying, it should be revived, for that the structure of it should be renewed]. The play condemns the way the contemporary *pancharas* teams exploit the body of subaltern women, making them dance erotically on stage to entertain the male-gaze of the audience. Contrastingly, through Subal master, the playwright addresses a message that women on stage in traditional roles can save a marginalised woman and the marginalised performing art from being further marginalised. Unfortunately, by conforming to this the play follows the patriarchal norm of restricting the identity of a woman as a stereotypical angel/devi in the house. The play also expresses the subjugation of marginalised male artists like Jagattaran or Jaga who perform as a woman in *lettopala*. Despite the humiliation of society for his effeminacy, Jaga continues to wear a sari. He dances simultaneously like a woman to assert his identity as a *letto* artist. Similarly, the play *Pratikkha* exposes the hypocrisy of the *bhanjo* artists who tend to compromise the strength of tradition for commercial purposes. This is a play by Dishari (a theatre group of Labpur, Birbhum) under the script and direction of Parthapradip Singha which was first performed in 2015. ‘*Bhanjo*’ is one of the Bengali folk festivals celebrated especially by the maidens during the month of ‘Bhadra’. Maintaining *brata* or penance, they worship the goddess of harvesting as their family members or relatives share their stories through rhyming songs and dance to express their desires. This is mainly a seasonal ritual like *Bhadu* in which the maidens celebrate to please the clay model of village deity of the crops that they place in the middle while dancing in a circle. This play is dealt with the competition between two teams of *bhanjo* performers representing two villages Muchipara and Nougaram. The playwright has also condemned the marginalisation of female dancers (*nachuni*) like Pari of these teams. Society looks down upon them for dancing or performing and engaging with male artists like Rakhna. The lack of female artists is already damaging the interest of this folk performing art in the villages. Presenting the love story of Rakhna and Pari, the play incorporates several rhyming *bhanjo* songs based on the theme of love.

Glorifying the legend of Dharmathakur (a regional folk deity degenerated from Buddhists in Bengal), *Dharmamangal* (a branch of

Mangalkavyas written by poets like Mayur Bhatta and Rupram Chakraborty) played an immense role in shaping the tradition of worshipping indigenous deities in the Rarh region of Bengal. The myth of Dharma and the epic narrative of *Dharmamangal* represented a socially segregated class, and its primary purpose was to establish the superiority of the folk deity Dharmathakur among the tribes. The festival of Dharmapuja is celebrated in this southern Rarh district of Birbhum by the tribal communities of *bauris*, *hadks*, *chandals*, *doms* and others. Gradually due to the Brahmanic influence, the worshippers turned Hinduised who began to identify Dharma with the Aryan deity Siva, and the Non-Aryan myth became suppressed. Consequently, the tribal communities associated with this cult of Dharma were getting marginalised by the upper caste and class people. But somehow, they get the opportunity to subvert the system during the festive season of Dharampuja while the Brahmins and upper class people worship them as the *bhakta* or the child of Dharmaraj. Adapting Anupam Dutta's drama *Dwadash Bhakta Chadum*, Dubrajpur *Victorjara* in 1998 and later Suri *Anan* performed the play with the same title in Birbhum with an attempt to trace the folk-trajectory of Dharma in connection with the indigenous dancing taboos of *bhakta* and the performance of *swaang*. *Swaang* had turned the Dharma-cult to be a major attraction in the puja of *Charak* during the *Gajan* festival. The sarcastic comments during the performance of *swaang* team expose the hypocrisy of caste system in the villages that privilege Brahmins and allow them to exploit the people of lower caste tribes. Caste-based subalternity is one of the key factors as pointed out by Ranjit Guha. In this play the people of Madhpur village consider the Brahmins superior and sacred to maintain the temple and touch the throne of Lord Dharma. They even consider the priest Abani Debangshi as an incarnation of god who has the sole right to control the rituals of Dharam puja. Chadum Bagdi, the central character, being a representative of the lower caste poor peasant, is shown here as a symbol of protest in this play. He is trying to debunk the hegemony of the upper caste through his bold and boisterous activities. Desire to live a human life in a world without class status and distinction drives Chadum Bagdi to rebel against the hierarchical system on the occasion of Gajan. After attaining the so-called *debatta* or divinity Chadum boldly asserts his triumph against the barriers of casteism.

But the play fails to provide a positive outcome of this subaltern resistance as Chadum faced humiliation and subjugation. Chadum laments at the end: “চেপ্টা কল্লাম...মান মর্যাদা রক্ষার চেপ্টা। যি মানুষ, যি সমাজ, যি ধর্ম ইটি কেঁরে লিয়েছে, তাদের হাত থেকে ফিরাবার চেপ্টা...কিন্তু পাল্লাম না। “*chasta kollam...man morjada rakhar chasta. ji manush, ji somaj, ji dhammoitikera liyeche, tader hat theke phirabar chasta... kintu pallam na*” (Dutta 43) [My translation: I tried...tried to maintain our self-respect. The people, the society, the religion that stole it...I tried to regain it from them, but I failed.].

With the guidance and direction of Ujjal Mukhopadhyay, Labpur’s theatre group Birbhum Sanskriti Bahini has been making the leading contribution among the theatre groups of Birbhum. They are trying to revive the folk elements in theatre experimenting with form and content of folk performing arts that are struggling to survive. Ujjal Mukhopadhyay, renowned theatre researcher, practitioner, and most importantly, the director and founder of Birbhum Sanskriti Bahini, is appropriating the folk myths from the *mangalkavyas* to create a mythopoeic world on stage. Their play *Behula Lakhindar Pala* has rejuvenated the famous Bengali epic *Manasamangal* into *putulnaach* or puppet dance form by moulding the characters like goddess Manasa, Chand Bonic, Behula and Lakhindar into Human puppets or *manabputul*. Here Puppet dance is fused with the folk form of Jatra, which is also known as *pala*. Again their endeavour to appropriate *Dharmamangal* (the epic of Rarh) into a complete version of the play with the same title has brought recognition and appreciation. The play *Dharmamangal* presents a cultural fusion among the clusters of society representing urban elite cultures of king Debpal, Mahamad, minister of the king of Gour and comparatively marginal regional culture by Lausena, son of Karnasena. He was the feudal lord of Maynagarh under the king of Gaur. The director manages to sum up the entire proceeding of making Lausena (the central character) learn the art of warfare by enacting several folk performing arts of Birbhum like *Raibenshe* and *Ranpa*. Ranjit Guha writes in *Subaltern Studies*, “When a peasant rose in revolt or any time or place ... he did so necessarily and explicitly in violation of a series of codes which defined his very existence as a member of that ... semi-feudal society” (Guha 123). Since ancient times,

these folk martial dance forms evolved in Birbhum, practised mainly by landlords' *kotals* or *lathials* (guards). Characterised by energetic body movements and vigorous acrobatics, these dances are mainly performed by the male artists with the help of a long bamboo pole which is known as '*raibanshi*' or '*ranpa*' for the respective dance forms. These folk dance artists are marginalized desperately struggling to preserve their heritage in Birbhum. Kalu Dom and his *Raibenshe* team expressed gratitude to Birbhum Sanskriti Bahini for giving them the opportunity to perform their traditional dance in theatre.

The most thrilling episode of *Dharmamangal* is the confrontation of Lausena with Kamdal, a tiger while crossing the jungle on his way to reach Gour. This was again a conspiracy of Mahamad to kill Lausena, but with his patience, kindness, pity and intellect, Lausena wins the heart of the wild tiger. To enact this scene on stage, the director takes the help of a *Bahurupi* who by profession entertains people by taking the disguise of a tiger, so it becomes easier for the folk artist to play the role of Kamdal tiger. *Bahurupi* or *Swang* is a type of folk art performed by the village artists who entertain people by disguising mostly Hindu deities or animals, singing songs and performing popular incidents from myths and epics. There was a time in Birbhum district when the *Bahurupi* artists used to perform in fairs to entertain people. But, at present, this colourful, multi-faceted profession is facing a lot of problems. Today our entertainment equipment and alternatives have proliferated in such a wide expansion that the current generation is almost going to forget about these village entertainers. The script of *Arupkatha* is based on the life of Gurupada Bahurupi that reflected these challenges and problems of Bahurupis. It is written by Birbhum's theatre maestro Atanu Burman and performed by Attaja (a group theatre of Suri, Birbhum) under the direction of Mukul Siddiqui. This play is centred on the life of *Bahurupies* like Subal Bahurupi, Gadadhar Bahurupi, Nitai Bahurupi and others in the Anantapur village. Gurupada Bahurupi, a predecessor of Chinath Bahurupi, is combatting poverty and hardships with his daughter Basanti in his small hut. Gurupada is much concerned regarding the denuding interest of people and the present generation about the art of *Bahurupi*. He laments the crisis: "সব হরিং গেলো রে, সব শিশ হয়ে গেলো, সিদিন আর নেই

বটে।” “*sob haring gelo rey, sob sish hoye gelo, sidin r nei bote*” [My translation: Everything is lost, nothing exists anymore, and that happy old time is no more]. Due to the challenges and obstacles in this profession, Gurupada’s son Habu decides to live in the city to earn money instead of supporting his father in his profession. So, the conflict between the two generations is evident in the contrastive perspectives of the father and the son. Habu is looking for materialistic benefits and conceptualises the world of the artists submerged in commercialisation. The theatre groups treated this crisis as an issue of subalternity on stage. Likewise, *Dhanapati Upakkhan* is another play produced by Theatre Abhijan (a group theatre of Suri, Birbhum), which is centred on the miserable life of Dhanapati Bahurupi. This play is written and directed by Subinay Das, the veteran theatre artist of this district who has been an experienced member of the group Theatre Abhijan since its inception as a club Abhijan in Suri. Here Dhanapati represents the younger generation of a Bahurupi family. Like Habu, he also doesn’t intend to continue his father’s profession. He considers earning a meagre through this profession as sheer beggary that could not relieve his family from poverty— “তিন চার মাস চাষের কাজ আর বাকি সময় রঙ মেখে বহুরূপী সেজে লোকের দোড়ে দোড়ে ভিক্ষা করা।” “*tin char mash chasher kaj r baki somoy rong mekhe bahurupi seje loker dore dore bhikkha kora*” (Das 106) [My translation: Peasantry for 3-4 months and rest of the time the trend is to be a bahurupi by painting colours to beg on the doors of people.]. This father-son conflict or the conflict between generations is also presented in other plays like *Boglo Bayen* and *Kobi Katha*. *Boglo Bayen* is another play by Labpur’s Birbhum Sanskriti Bahini that gives expression to the misery of *bayens* of Bengal. These *bayens*, with their drums (known to Bengalis as *dhaak* or *dhol*) and *kasors* (an instrument made of brass metal), create a festive atmosphere that provides delight and happiness to the people ready to involve in the festivals. These village artists who are proficient in this skill are known to the local people as *dhaaki* or *dhuli* for performing with *dhaak* or *dhol*. They belong to the *bayen* communities; the families of this community have been living in the interior villages of Birbhum. Now the public is no more dependent on these *bayens* as they prefer other alternatives in the festivals. The source of meagre income from this

profession is further reduced, which has created reluctance in the younger generation to carry on the legacy of *bayen* tradition. Ujjal Mukhopadhyay has addressed this issue of subalternity in the play *Boglo Bayen*. Boglo Bayen is the protagonist of the play, an eighty-year-old *dhaaki* who earns his livelihood by beating his drum in festivals. He wants to maintain the hierarchy by handing over his drum to his son Hari who doesn't want to continue his father's occupation.— “ও বুড়ো ঢোল বাজিছে বোলে আমাকেও ঢোল বাজাইতে হবে নাকি? ...শালা ঢোল বাজিয়ে কি আর জেবন চলে যায়!!” “*oh buro dhol bajieche bole amakeo dhol bajaite hobe naki? ...sala dholbajiye ki r jebon cholechya!?*” (Mukhopadhyay 47) [My translation: I am not bound to beat drums like my aged father...its not possible to spend the entire life by just beating drums!]. Later, Boglo Bayen's fosterling Bongshi comes with a ray of hope and happily takes the drum from his grandfather, thus agreeing to carry his tradition further.

Malay Ghosh addresses this conflict in his play *Kabi Katha*. Under the direction of Malay da, Ilora (a theatre group in Bolpur, Birbhum) has staged more than a hundred shows of this play. Twentieth-century Birbhum had been the reputable place for being the abode of the greatest Kabiyaals of Bengal like Lambodar Chakraborty, Kisharimohan Ray, Deben Das, Gumani Deouan, Kalo Pal and others. Lack of opportunities and decaying interest has driven this traditional folk-performing art into the margin. With the advent of modernity, *Kabigaan* and “Kabir Larai” are leading towards extinction from Bengal, so it is high time to regenerate or revive this art form. Incorporating ‘*panchali gaan*’, ‘*bandana gaan*’, ‘*bol kata*’, ‘*akhrai*’ and other varieties of *Kabigaan*, the play tells us the story of struggling artist Chandra Kabiyaal and his *dhuli* or drum artist Lalu. Although Lalu is pessimistic about sharing his concern that *Kabigaan* might disappear sooner, Chandra retains his hope to survive with this art even amid this crisis. The lack of interest in the younger generation to engage in the traditional profession of Kabiyaals and take part in “*Kabirlarai*” is the key reason behind this decline. Taking this as an outdated burden, they are mostly reluctant to carry forward the legacy. In this play, Nanda, who is the one and only son of Chandra Kabiyaal, represents this reluctant generation with their tendency to choose an unbeaten track. Nanda being a band artist, never bothers to join his father as a helping hand in the

competitions. He has no intention to be a Kabiyaal like his father. Rather he is determined to give his commitment to modern songs or western music. But ultimately, the gap is bridged at the end when Nanda decides to follow in the footsteps of his father, leaving his interest in Band music. Nanda shares his observation: “যুগের সঙ্গে তাল মেলাতে না পারলে যুগ ছুঁয়ে ফেলে দেবে শিল্পকে। সরকারি দক্ষিণে আর মানুষের করুণায় শিল্প বেঁচে থাকতে পারে না বাবা ...শিল্পিকে তার নিজের জোরে বাঁচতে হবে।”^২ “*Juger sange tal melate na parle jug chure phele debe shilpake. Sarkari dakkhinye r manusher karunay shilpa benche thakte pare na baba...shilpake tar nijer jore banchte hobe.*”² [My translation: The decade will throw the art into dirt if it fails to cope with the progress of the decade. Dear father, art cannot survive merely through the meagre support of govt and the sympathy of people. The art needs to struggle for its survival.]. These points are all addressing the prominent factor of culture based subalternity. An interesting fact is that just as these plays have addressed a similar crisis in the life of artists, they have also endorsed recoveries—the victory of tradition. In *Boglo Bayen*, Hari, after realising his fault, returns to his village to embrace his ancestral heritage. Again in *Arupkatha*, after seeing her father die with his unrequited dream, Basanti decides to follow the footsteps of her father. With strong moral faith and determination she prepares herself as a trained Bahurupi to denounce the patriarchal mind-set of people that a woman cannot be a Bahurupi— “কে বলিছে বিটিছেলেরা বহুরূপী হয় না? শিল্পী হয় না? ...আমি দেখিন দেবো শিল্পী হতে আমরাও পারি।”^৩ “*ke boliche biti chelera bahurupi hoy na, shilpi hoy na?...ami dekHING debo shilpi hote amrao pari*”³ [My translation: who says that a woman cannot be a Bahurupi, an artist?... I will prove that we can also be an artist.]. The play thus ends with a feminist message when Basanti with the disguise of Buddha (which was her father’s next project) walks towards performing a show leading her male group members. So, tradition is never compromised in these plays.

Tarashankar’s novel *Hansulibanker Upakatha* has been wonderfully dramatised by Mahadeb Dutta and Atulshib club (a theatre group in Labpur). Mahadeb Dutta directed this play with the same title *Hansulibanker Upakatha* on the Atulshib Mancha in 1992. The director

attempts to cut short the huge novel by showing how Tarashankar traces the process of change as the traditional culture of the Kahars undergoes various social transformations when confronted with external forces like mechanisation, monetisation and colonisation. Whereas the ‘high caste’ Choudhurys become the owners of land and gain in wealth and status, the Kahars, on the other hand, lose their earlier occupation as domestics and guards of the *neelkothi* and sink further down in social prestige. Caste system is shown as the most visible constraint on individual behaviour and interpersonal relations in the novel and this play. Defying this caste system, Karali questions the system— “জাত কার আছে? কোন ব্যাটার আছে শুনি? ভদ্রলোকের পা চেটে পড়ে থাক...প্যাটে ভাত যোটে না, পড়নে কাপড় যোটে না, জাতকুল নিয়ে রথে চড়ে স্বগ্যে যাবো?” “*jat kar ache? kon byatar ache suni? bhaddarloker paa chete pore thak...pyate bhat jotena, parane kapor jotena, jat kulniye rathe chore swagge jabo?*” (Dutta 76) [My translation: I want to know that person who has a caste! neither can I afford enough rice to free my hunger, nor enough clothes to cover my body. What will I do with my caste?]. Again the predicaments of gendered subalternity are—more or less—included in this play. Suchand—the primordial older woman and the central narrator of Hansuli also narrate stories of illegitimate relationships between the Kahar women, the Choudhury or Ghosh men, and the British sahibs. These low caste women are left with few options but accept their illegitimate child. They are dependent on the upper castes and the inequality of caste relations getting mapped on their bodies. The norms of seclusion and segregation between the masculine and feminine spheres are rendered meaningless in communities like those of the Kahars living in extreme poverty and deprivation. Param is shown in the play as a ruthless husband dominating his wife Kalosashi in all aspects. Param threatens to kill her— “কুলটা মাগি, তোর হাত-পা ভেঙে জন্মের মতো খোঁড়া করে রাখবো। অঙের নেশা—জৈবনের মতো শ্যাষ করে দেবো।” “*kulta magi, tor hat-pa venge jonmer moto khora kore ekbo. aungernesha—chero jeboner moto sash kor debo*” (63) [My translation: You spoiled nymph! I will damage your legs to make you lame forever...I’ll destroy the desire of your body.]. This states that marginalization of women starts from their home, wherein they are

considered useless and second sex. In Kahar community and every aspect of society, a woman lacks freedom even if she is worshipped as a deity. *Naginikanyar Kahini* is a novel by Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, adapted into a play with the same title by Ujjal Mukhopadhyay. Birbhum Sanskriti Bahini (a group theatre of Birbhum), under the direction of the writer himself, performed this play for the first time in 2011 at Rabindrabhaban stage of Suri in Birbhum. In this novel, Tarashankar describes the community of the Santhali *bede* or snake charmers, settled in the dense forest on the banks of Bhagirathi. The director incorporates a folk song known as “Bisaharir gaan” (a song that narrates the story of *Manasamanga*) to depict the identity of snake-goddess Manasa. The play describes the cursed life of two *naginikanyas*—Shabala and Pingala. Shabala, the *naginikanya* before Pingala, revolted against the community rule that prohibited her from having sexual contact with any man. She falls in love with another young man of her community who is treacherously murdered by the earlier headman Mahadeb. Shabala then kills the headman, jumps into the Bhagirathi and swims away. Despite her attraction to Nago Thakur, the male-dominated community compels Pingala to suppress feelings and emotions and be a voiceless subaltern forever. Pingala fails to dissociate herself from her communal identity of a *nagini*—
“না না আমি লারি নয়, আমি কালনাগিনী। আমার সারা শরীরে বিষ। আমার বিশ্বাসে বিষ...আমি মা বিষহরির কন্যা।” “*na na ami lari noy, ami Kalnagini. amar sara shorire bish. amar niswashe bish...ami maa bisaharir kanya*” (Mukhopadhyay 131) [My translation: No no I’m not a woman, I’m Kalnagini. My entire body is poisonous, poison is in my breath...I’m the daughter of Mother Bisahari.]. Dealing with the ancient ritual of *sati* of colonial India, Spivak in her essay, highlights the conspiracy of patriarchy to treat women as scapegoats for colonial and colonized masters. The novel ends with scapegoat Pingala’s death and the destruction of the prejudices of the Santhali snake charmers. The director thus concludes the play with a feminist message condemning the backdated patriarchal mentality of the society.

The plays mentioned above mirror the sufferings of the voiceless sections of the society. With their authentic choice of scripts, they have

wonderfully portrayed the politics of people of Birbhum. Their subaltern identity on stage endows the rural folk of marginalised communities to present voices and perspectives otherwise unspoken and unheard. The redundant account of their socio-economic predicament emerged as an epitome of reflecting the marginalised in theatre. Nemichandra Jain writes in his article: “One of the most crucial challenges confronting post-independence India has been to find its own distinctive identity as a country, and in its endeavours in various fields, which had been blurred in many ways by more than a century of foreign domination” (Jain 25). These theatre groups in Birbhum district have taken this challenge by incorporating folk idioms both in form and content. These select plays tell us to rethink subalterns and restore their identities by keeping aside dominant rules. Therefore, I hope that the intra-cultural or intra-regional impetus of my paper will surely contribute to the way to the larger search for the identity of the regional theatres that are working with the marginalised.

Notes

1. The quoted lines are derived from the script of the play *Arupkatha*. So couldn't mention the page number.
2. The quoted lines are derived from the script of the play *Kabikatha*. So couldn't mention the page number.

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Emergence of the Virtual: Is it the Future of Theatre in Post-Covid World?

Swati Roy Chowdhury

Abstract

The present paper attempts to study the global rise of Virtual theatre during the post-Covid era with special emphasis on the reasons behind such emergence, various ways in which Virtual theatres are operating both globally and nationally, and variety of responses such a surfacing has generated, thereby trying to figure out whether such a form of theatre can actually someday act as a proper replacement of the more popular form of live theatre.

Keywords: Virtual theatre, post-pandemic,

While for centuries, theatre professionals have marvelled at this medium “being real” compared to television and cinema, they have now begun to acknowledge that the digital space and the traditional stage must coexist.(Nag, Arundhati qtd. in Shruthi HM Sastry, n.pag)

The discovery of the Novel Corona virus (or Covid-19) in China’s Wuhan can be deemed as the most influential event that mankind has experienced in over a period of two centuries. The virus for which a full-proof vaccine is yet to be found (not until the writing of this paper) has globally affected billions of lives and killed people in a number that would appear dreadful even to Satan. Apart from the global medical emergency that it has ushered in, the need to check the virus by breaking human contact has also fostered sea changes in the way 21st. century human were accustomed to live their lives. In place of the more coveted practice of human intimacy the replaced normal is ‘physical distancing’

which urges people to keep distance and avoid crowd. Thus, most offices have closed their buildings and encouraged employees to work from home. Schools, colleges and other educational institutions have also shut their gates for students and teachers – enabling virtual learning as an alternate mode of education. In this scenario, as it may be commented, connecting people virtually has become one of the more popular and in-demand alternative. All over the world the tendency is to exploit this virtual world to stay connected and thrive.

In this era of the unprecedented and rapid growth of the virtual mode, it is needless to say that all sectors which have a considerable number of people associated with them for their daily bread are trying to cope with the novel changes by using the virtual mode as their means of survival. Theatre industry being largely dependent on its connection with the audience is no exception. The closure of theatres across the globe from March, 2020 (in some cases they were closed in some later period, depending on the intensity of the spread of the virus) meant that theatre companies would go out of work. And it was going to have two major adverse impacts upon the production houses. Firstly, because theatre does not only mean art but it also means business and it offers means of sustenance to people associated with it, the closure of theatres would mean people running out of work and money. Secondly, the long-term success of a production house depends a lot on the kind of impact it can have on public memory. A long gap from public memory would mean that the very existence of the house would be at stake. Hence, need-based changes made in the theatrical realm have been the call of the day.

The rapid rise and growth of virtual theatre in the post-Covid world is, therefore, neither surprising nor unthinkable. If we take a look at the global theatrical scenario we can easily find out how, apart from the amateur theatre houses which have been using social media platforms for showcasing their productions to a larger number of audience much before the pandemic has seen light of the day, now even larger production houses are also shifting to the virtual mode for being in the business.

An analysis of the collated data from various sources shows that there are roughly three major ways in which virtual platforms are being used by the theatre production houses:

- i. Streaming archived recordings of previously performed plays.
- ii. Recording live proscenium performances and streaming them.
- iii. Streaming informal performances created through virtual interactive platforms.

Virtual Theatre: The Global Scenario Now

Broadcasting pre-recorded popular performances has become one of the major ways in which production houses are trying to keep themselves in the business. The modus operandi for this kind of a project is pretty simple. Most modern production houses or other archiving agencies have been recording performances of popular plays from much before the pandemic. In the present scenario they are utilizing these resources not only to entertain the bulk of audience now confined at home, but also to keep the business alive. Most of the times they are getting streamed through the production houses' own websites. For example according to the report by *Belfast Telegraph* (online edition) dated 1st. June, 2021 even the British Broadcasting Corporation or BBC in its initiative called Culture in Quarantine "will feature a combination of premieres and older plays recorded for the first time" (n.pag).

As published in a report in the website *Londontheatre1.com*, Jonty Claypole, the Director of BBC Arts has emphasized on this new method of reaching out to theatre audience in unambiguous terms:

This has been the hardest year in living memory for the performing arts – and the crisis is far from over. It is only right that the BBC – which has worked arm-in-arm with writers, performers and off-stage talent day-in day-out over the last 100 years – should support and celebrate our performing arts at this time. This is why BBC Culture in Quarantine is launching Lights Up: a major season devoted to theatre, celebrating the UK's stages, its artists, the shows that we cannot see, for millions at home around the country. The shows come from every corner of the UK – from Belfast to Glasgow, Cardiff to London. And, as well as broadcasting new and recent productions, we are also using our broadcast and digital platforms to celebrate all that theatres do for our society. Theatre has been

at the heart of our culture for centuries and will continue to be so for many to come. (n. pag)

Therefore, it doesn't come as a surprise to the audience when BBC announced that it would be collaborating with more than 12 theatres and theatrical producers across the UK for more than 15 newly-recorded plays. Each play was a partnership between BBC Arts and a theatre or producer and many productions were recorded on the stages of empty theatres.

Along with BBC, the National Theatre at Home Project run by the National Theatre, London supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies has a dedicated website to let subscribers watch the recordings of their popular productions. Marked as "Hidden Gems" in the website, a separate section contains recordings of many popular previous productions by the house like *Consent*, *Medea*, *I Want My Hat Back* etc.

The concept of Virtual Theatre as the safest feasible option for theatre lovers in the post-Covid era has been embraced by the US Theatres as well. The Broadway HD founded by Stewart F. Lane and BonieComlie in 2015, for instance, has been engaged in streaming full length stage plays recorded specifically for multiplatform viewing all over the world. Similarly, On the Boards, a Portland based experimental theatre production house has been recording and streaming its performances online for reasonable rates of subscription. On the other hand, the Digital Theatre website is making pre-recorded British stage productions available to its paid viewers.

While most of the theatre houses are allowing subscription bound views of the on-line streaming of their old and new productions through their own websites, there are some performances which are being put on air through the popular media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Youtube. For instance, Theatre without Theatre has an Instagram handle with 7096 followers where the theatre artists collaborate to enact small pieces, sing songs or just share their theatrical experiences to keep the theatrical vibes alive. Even National Theatre, UK has also posted recorded versions of full-length plays in Youtube for free-viewing, with gentle requests made towards viewers' contributions as a fundraiser for theatre

workers in distress. Each of these videos get near about thousand views which is a sign of its acceptance among the viewers.

Sometimes these require subscription to enable people to watch them, thereby enabling the production houses to meet their financial needs. Some other times even when watching such plays would require no subscription we find that they are interspersed with advertisements, which again help the production houses meet their financial demands through sponsorship.

Virtual Theatre in India

There is, however, a slow but steady trend of recognition of Virtual theatre that is taking place in the Indian theatrical scenario. Important cultural bodies have finally come to terms with the present reality and are entering into the domain of Virtual theatre. While most theatre groups of fame aren't too eager to deem virtual theatre as a befitting replacement of the traditional form, yet it is heartening to see that some of them are gradually responding to the digital platform with an affirmative note of acceptance.

Sangeet Natak Academy, an autonomous body under the Government of India was set up to promote Indian performance culture. In these trying times this academy is relying on the virtual media to continue its function. It has a dedicated Facebook page that showcases various performances including plays and choreographies. They had also organized a festival called *Rang Sangam Natya Samaroha* between 26th and 29th March, 2021. This festival featured five plays from four different language regions of India. They were recorded in empty theatres before being posted in Sangeet Natak Academy's Facebook page and Youtube channel.

Similarly, eminent playwright and theatre director Mahesh Dattani has also embraced digital theatre as a medium of his expression in the post-Covid era. His play *Hasmukh Sahab Ki Wasihat*- written in 1985 out of the necessity of submitting a play for a competition- is now available in Zee Theatre which is an online platform with a considerably good collection of both national and global 'teleplays'¹. Zee Theatre, which is also available over various DTH platforms, requires monthly subscription, ensuring

that the financial requirements of a theatre production are adequately taken care of.

As has been already mentioned, financial concern is one of the major impetus for the emergence of virtual theatre in the post-Covid era. But that is not all. Some theatre personalities do find the challenges involved in making a virtual production of a play challenging and rewarding as well. Theatre artist Dipti Mahadev, for example, was touring the entire country with her solo play *Kabutar JaJa* when the country got hit by the pandemic and all shows were stopped. Cancelled shows caused the team a financial setback and to cope with such incurred losses she had to accept offers to direct online plays for financial sustenance. Initially skeptical about the acceptability of such productions, she later found more people watching her plays online than she ever had in her live performances. She also found dealing with this new genre aesthetically challenging and satisfying too. In an interview to *The Citizen* she has said:

As a team, we were sceptical about the whole medium initially, but soon the process of discovery led by the director went on to be as enriching as any stage play I had done (n.pag)

What is evident from Mahadev's realization is that while there certainly are some merits of a Virtual theatre most theatre enthusiasts avoid it because of their habitual acceptance of the dictums of the proscenium. But once that habit is broken, virtual theatre may be found to be a genre with prospects. What is implied in this deduction may be one of the reasons why big brands in Indian theatre have either adopted the virtual version of performance late or haven't accepted it at all. Their preoccupation with the traditional theatre as a sanctum sanctorum is a part of their brand identity and they might have considered this radical shift a gross violation of principles.

Things are however different with the amateur theatre groups. Still in search of established reputation, they are more at ease with experimentations of this kind. While the big names in Indian theatre have partially accepted the budding form but not without a grain of salt, for the amateur theatre groups Virtual theatre has resurfaced as a boon. Now

their performances are available for viewing globally through Facebook telecast, both live and recorded, Instagram handles or even as WhatsApp links, Skype broadcast or Telegram uploads. A case in point would be Raveesh Jaiswal of the Bombay Theatre Company who was about to set his production in April, 2020 when the pandemic hit them hard. Being new the block they had to depend on online platform to showcase their effort. Raveesh told *The Citizen*:

I thought of putting my plays on Instagram. As I thought that no one would watch an hour or more on Zoom, YouTube, I decided to use the Instagram feature of going live to do shorter plays. (qtd. in Sahni, n.pag)

From the same report one is informed that the response that Jaiswal received for his 10 minute Insta plays was more that what he had thought for. His short plays were viewed online by around 2-3 thousand viewers, much more than he would have got for offline performances.

Reactions to Virtual Theatre

Globally the emergence of Virtual theatre in the post-pandemic era has received mixed reactions from professionals, critics as well as audiences. The more conservative section refuses to admit that such emergence has any significance on following grounds:

Firstly, theatre is distinct from other narrative performances by virtue of the kind of communication it provides between the performers and the audience. Live interaction between them is what makes the experience of the theatre memorable. In absence of any such communication theatre loses its essence. According to Cunningham:

...it has something to do with location, and feeling, and your invisible relationship with individual performers and the whole panoply of action on the stage. (n.pag)

Secondly, such performances require a certain kind of continuity to engage the audience into the make believe world of theatre. Possibility of technical glitches like poor network and drop of network may, thus, affect the audience's experience adversely.

Thirdly, theatre is one such performance space where audience's choice of spectacle is not obstructed by the singularity of the director's perspective. Yet in virtual theatre camera angles become very important in determining the focus of the audience. Thus, virtual theatres create restrictive experience for the audience

While most of the adverse criticisms showered on Virtual theatre are from the perspective of audience experience, there are certain technical difficulties involved too which we cannot overlook. Director and Theatre critic Emily Lyat comments:

One of the biggest struggles about doing a virtual show is just the fact not everyone's internet connection is stable, not everybody has the same processing speed, I guess, and that not everyone has the right areas or access to put up a green screen, which is one of the things we were definitely troubleshooting with... (Lyat, Emile qtd. in Melcher. n.pag)

In spite of plethora of criticisms one cannot deny that the emergence of Virtual theatre wasn't only inevitable, but it has also surfaced as beneficial for many related to theatre. For example, it has increased the number of viewers for performances. According to Warrington:

While theatres remain dark, there is seemingly more theatre taking place now than before, or rather, more people are able to participate. Prior to this time, the ability to access theatre largely depended on your geographic location. (n.pag)

Thus, Virtual theatre is bridging the gap between audiences of different regions and connecting them to audience from the entire globe.

To conclude it may be said that while the emergence of Virtual theatre came as a necessity during a period of shut theatre halls, it is here to stay. Especially in the post-covid era when even opened theatres would encounter diminished number of spectators following the norms of social distancing, Virtual theatre can act as a means to reach to more number of people at a lesser cost; more so because Covid has drastically minimized people's capacity to spend globally. To quote James Nicola²:

Virtual theatre isn't a replacement for the magic that happens within the walls of a theatre, but it's another stage to explore—one that removes obstacles that might have otherwise prevented someone from attending; removes the limitations of what's physically possible within a theatre, and one that allows many more artists to be developing and sharing new work in real-time (qtd. in Warrington, n.pag.)

Endnote

1. The term 'teleplay' has been used in the homepage of the website of Zee Theatre to refer to recorded theatre plays.
2. James Nicola is the Artistic Director at The New York Theatre Workshop and a practitioner of theatre in Virtual mode.

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Twins in Classical Literature and Comics

Musarrat Nazmi

In modern science, twins are known to originate from the same zygote and form into two embryos. Some families welcome twins as blessings, and for some others, twins are a very stressful burden. However, from times immemorial twins have been represented in literature around the world from classics to comics. The trend is continuing even in the 21st century. The concept of twins goes back as early as *The Ramayana* in India. The characters of Rama and his brother Lakshmana, though originally not twins yet are inseparable throughout the story. Often, the relationship between Rama and Lakshmana is quoted as an example of ideal brotherhood. We can even say that the relationship between both of them is divinely ordained. When Vishvamitra, the great sage, takes Rama for killing the demons in the forest, Lakshmana immediately accompanies them. At such a tender age, together they killed several demons who were a big threat to the earth. When Rama married Sita, Lakshmana followed him by marrying Sita's younger sister Urmila. Lakshmana's extreme love and respect for his brother Rama is also observed as he decided to stay with him for fourteen years of exile. Among the four sons of King Dasharatha, Lakshmana and Shatrughna are real twin brothers. Rama's sons Lava and Kusha are twins and their names are always taken together. Lava is said to have a whitish golden complexion like their mother, while Kusha had a blackish complexion like their father. The first chapter of *Ramayana*, '*Bala Kanda*' mentioned Valmiki narrating *The Ramayana* to his disciples Lava and Kusha. Nala and Neel were two engineers who constructed Rama Setu. Nala was son of Vishwakarma, the divine architect and like his father, he was himself a great engineer and builder. In some versions, Nala and Neel were shown as twins who were cursed by a sage that whatever they touch will not sink in the

water, but float. In *The Mahabharata*, the younger Pandavas Nakul and Sahadeva are twin brothers. The twins were blessed to their mother Madri by the divine physician Ashwini Kumars. The Ashvins, also known as Ashwini Kumara and Asvinau are twin gods associated with medicine, health, dawn, and sciences. Draupadi was the wife of the five Pandava brothers. Draupadi and her brother Dhrishtadyumna were also twins born from a yajna (fire sacrifice) organized by King Drupada of Panchala.

In Greek and Roman Mythology Castor and Pollux are twin half-brothers, known together as the Dioscuri. Their mother was Leda but fathers are different. Castor was fathered by Leda's husband Tyndareus, the king of Sparta. Pollux was the divine son of Zeus, who seduced Leda in the form of a swan. In Latin the twins are also known as Gemini or Castores. They are depicted sometimes as mortals, sometimes as immortal as transformed by Zeus Himself. Homer portrays them initially as ordinary mortal in the *Iliad* but in *Odyssey* they are treated as alive.

William Shakespeare's plays are not exceptions. Two of his major and popular comedies focus on twin siblings. The *comedy of Errors* (1594), one of his early comedies, tells the interesting story of two sets of identical twins. The other *Twelfth Night* (1602), is about a shipwrecked pair of twins who are separated and finally, reunited happily. Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* is about the story of two pairs of identical twins who were accidentally separated after birth. Antipholus of Syracuse and his servant Dromio of Syracuse, arrive in the town Ephesus which turns out to be the home of their long-lost twin brothers Antipholus of Ephesus and his servant, Dromio of Ephesus.

His romance *Twelfth Knight* is about two lovable twin sister and brother Viola and Sebastian who got separated in a shipwreck. In the unknown country Illyria, Viola disguises herself as a boy, taking the name Cesario, and becomes a servant to Duke Orsino. The duke sends her to woo Countess Olivia on his behalf, but the countess falls in love with Cesario. Finally, the comedy ends up through the happy marriages of Olivia and Sebastian, Orsino and Viola, and Sir Toby and Maria. The tragedy *Hamlet* (1603) depicts twin characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. When Hamlet kills Polonius, Claudius recruits Rosencrantz

and Guildenstern (Hamlet's childhood friends) to escort the Prince to England, providing them with a letter for the King of England instructing him to have Hamlet killed. They are apparently unaware of what is in the letter, though Shakespeare never explicitly says so. Along the journey, the distrustful Hamlet finds the letter and rewrites it, instructing the executioner to kill Rosencrantz and Guildenstern instead. When their ship is attacked by pirates, Hamlet returns to Denmark, leaving Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to die. Ambassadors returning later report that "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead."

William Goldsmith's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) depicts Sam and Eric as twin boys. They are so identical that Jack gives them the nickname "Samneric". They get easily excited, complete one another's sentences, and exist within their own small group of two. They initially devoted themselves to rescue but are easily overwhelmed by the ferocity of the tribe. The boys symbolize the well-intentioned members of the general public who follow the rules of whoever is in charge. In CS Lewis's *The Horse and His Boy* (1954) Shasta, a runaway urchin is easily mistaken for Prince Corin and swept up in his place. Later it turns out that Shasta is the long-lost twin brother of Corin. Shasta was born as the eldest son of King Lune of Archenland, and elder twin brother of Prince Corin, Shasta or Cor was kidnapped when he was an infant. He was raised as a fisherman's son in the country of Calormen.

In many countries of West Africa twins are regarded as having unique role in society. For example, the Igbo speaking people of southeast Nigeria feared the birth of twins. On the other hand, in southwest Nigeria, the Yoruba people praised the birth of twins. Igbo people viewed twins as supernatural beings that could ruin their society. They believed that twins possess supernatural powers that could bring devastation to society. In Chinua Achebe's acclaimed novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the Earth goddess had decreed twins "were an offence on the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offense against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land and not just on the offender" As a consequence of this superstition, whenever twins were born in the society, their parents had to leave them at the "Evil Forest" only to die. According to Achebe, "twins were put in

earthenware pots and thrown away in the forest”. Unlike the Igbo, the Yoruba considered twins to be of great importance. In the Yoruba religion, twins are believed to be protected by Shango, the God of thunder and lightning. The twins were highly taken care of and treated with honour. The Yoruba believed that twins had supernatural powers that could help them to increase their parents’ wealth.

Twins are a recurring theme in popular culture like comics. Twins dominated some of the major comics from Belgium to Bengal. Even some early comics like Lee Falk’s *Phantom* series, first published in 1936 recount the adventures of a costumed crime-fighter called the Phantom who operates from the fictional African country of Bangalla generation after generation with the same name. The character of Julie Walker is represented as the twin sister of Kit Walker who became 17th Phantom. Once he fell ill, Julie shouldered the responsibilities of the Phantom and performed the role well. Even 21st Phantom and his Wife Diana had twin children, Kit, and Heloise. Lee Falk’s other famous comics series *Mandrake the Magician* started to publish on June 11, 1934, by King Features Syndicate. Mandrake is a stage magician and hypnotist graduate of the College of Magic in Tibet. He also helped the Police Chief and Jed at Inter-Intel and an adventurer in a wide variety of environments. Derek is Mandrake’s twin brother and, thus, similar to Mandrake’s appearance. The brother used his magical powers, which were near to Mandrake’s, to achieve short-term personal satisfaction. Mandrake tried to remove Derek’s knowledge of magic but never entirely succeeded. Derek’s son Eric, with an unknown mother, shows no signs of following in his father’s footsteps.

Thomson and Thompson, Dupont et Dupond in French, are two lookalike characters in Belgian cartoonist Hergé’s world-famous comics series *The Adventures of Tintin*. The series first appeared in French on 10th January 1929, in *Le Petit Vingtième* (*The Little Twentieth*), a youth supplement to the Belgian newspaper *Le Vingtième Siècle* (*The Twentieth Century*). Thomson and Thompson are two incompetent detectives who provide much comic relief throughout the stories. While their different surnames suggest they are not identical twins, yet they look similar in

their appearances and conduct, the only difference is the shape of their moustaches.

The Scarlet Witch, created by writer Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby first appeared in *The X-Men* (March 1964). Scarlet Witch was first depicted as a reluctant supervillain along with her twin brother Pietro Maximoff or Quicksilver. In 1975 she married her android teammate Vision and later using borrowed magical forces she makes herself pregnant resulting in twin sons William ("Billy") and Thomas.

Handa and Bhonda, first published in 1962, is an immortal creation of the cartoonist Narayan Debnath. Handa and Bhonda are two teenage boys who stay together, walk side by side, talk one after another, and are never set apart. They are two cousins who live under the guardianship of Pishemosai, an elderly uncle. Their names are also taken together without any hyphen in between. Handa Bhonda can be seen as the two sides of the same personality. We can say it rather having split personality of the same person. Handa is slender with a stylish haircut and Bhonda is balky and simple. Handa is rather mischievous. He is lazy and wants to get rid of any serious tasks instructed by their uncle pishemosai. On the other hand, Bhonda performs the work seriously, ridiculed by Handa. So two opposing personalities, one mischievous, another bad, yet a strange bond of friendship between them keep them together. In some stories they make a mission together, sometimes Handa becomes good and works together with Bhonda, another time Bhonda got mischievous, and the two aim at doing some troublesome tasks. The concept of split personality is also clear from the fact that both the boys stay together. They play together, walk together, and eat together though they are completely opposite either in personal traits or in appearance. Another famous comic by Narayan Debnath, *Nonte Phonte*, first published in 1969, is also about two teenage boys. The boys namely Nonte and Phonte live in a hostel of a boarding school. The superintendent and the staff of the hostel and a school senior Keltuda are often pictured. Nonte is 16 years old, wears an orange shirt, and is immediately distinguishable from Phonte due to his longer hair and a tuft of hair sticking out from the back of his head. Phonte is a 15 years old boy, wearing a blue shirt, and is immediately distinguishable from Phonte due to his shorter hair

crew-cut. He is similar to Nonte in physical appearance though neither is related to each other. Nonte makes plans with Phonte to teach the mischievous Keltu a lesson. They seem to think alike as well. Bachhu and Bichchu are two look-alike characters in the comic series *Bantul, the Great*. They regularly play truant at school, often conspire with robbers, and commit daring crimes like bank robberies.

From the beginning of civilization twins are always of central importance and attraction. For their look alike feature and inseparable bonding twins always form a type of single unit. Sometimes they are treated as one entity, having similar character traits. Some famous characters in literature have evil twins. This type of twin is physically nearly identical to the protagonist, but with a radically inverted morality. However, the concept of evil twins goes back to ancient Iranian religion, especially Zoroastrianism. According to Prophet Zarathustra, Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord, created the twin spirits Spenta Mainyu and Angra Mainyu (Ahriman). Spenta Mainyu is related to Ahura Mazda himself. He protects many realms and creatures-the sky, water, earth, plants and children yet to be born. On the other hand, Angra Mainyu is destructive and deceptive, and related to darkness and death. In literature, *Beowulf* is an early example of representing the story of evil twin. Comics book also contains some early examples of evil twins. Besides, Mandrake's evil twin brother Derek, another example of early twins in comics is found in *King Ottokar's Sceptre* by Hergé which originally was published in 1938-39. Tintin is hired by Professor Alembick as his secretary and together they fly to Syldavia. In course of the story, it turns out that the real Alembick has been abducted in the beginning of the story, and unknown to Tintin replaced by an antagonist, in a plan to steal the sceptre. At the end of the story, Tintin understands the impostor was the evil twin of the professor.

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The TI Manifesto

THEATRE INTERNATIONAL, EAST-WEST Perspectives on Theatre: the title tells you where we are at. This is an international journal-cum-Dramabook. In the constitution of its Editorial Board, in its wide-angle global readership, in its range and scope of subject matter and focus, in its selection of experts and specialist writers this publication caters to the frontierless international community of the Performing Arts and Artists.

This publication hopes to enrich the Indian theatre culture in concrete ways—for the present dramatic culture lacks a creative correlation between theory and praxis. Our connections and involvement in University Performing Arts, Drama and Literature Departments makes **Theatre International** favorably situated to bridge the grey areas between pedagogy and performance. On the other hand, theatre is ultimately performance. Hence papers and articles on the productional aspects will find valuable place in all issues of *TI*.

Moreover, the realization that the theatre cuts across both culture and history is evident in the works of our avant-garde theatre thinkers. The University Drama Departments have every access to and special avenues of communication with theatre movements throughout India and abroad. *TI* is committed to the task of making the necessary intercultural linkages and disseminating the available material to theatre enthusiasts and professionals here. Likewise, *TI* can help make the intelligentsia abroad aware of the Indian, Asian and African theatre scene. Hence *TI* can serve as a medium and forum for international cultural exchange.

Both our masthead and our readership include and span high-IQ decision makers in the performing arts spread across the five continents—University Faculty, members of Akademis and theater ensembles, performing artists and intellectuals, the cultural avantgarde of Europe, America and Asia. The contents of *TI* will thus range from *Kathakali* to

Kabuki, from the *Yakshagana* to the *Guerilla theatre*, from the *Peking Opera* to the performative processes of the *African folk traditions*, from Tagore to T. S. Eliot, Shakespeare to Stanislavsky, Kafka to Karnad, reflecting and embodying the creative thrust of the global theatre scene.

TI has published and will publish *Special Issues* in future on Brecht, Tagore, Folk theatre, Political theatre, Theatre and Film, Translation, Adaptation and, of course, on Shakespeare among other subject areas.

The Shakespeare Society of Eastern India, under whose aegis *TI* is being published, has helped spearhead the new resurgence of both academic and popular interest in Shakespeare that emerged from the mid-seventies throughout Bengal and India.

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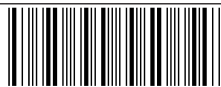


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