

New Directions in Contemporary Indian Scenography

A study of the works of three contemporary theatre directors
(Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivaraman)

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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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Declaration

This dissertation titled “**New Directions in Contemporary Indian Scenography: A study of the works of three contemporary theatre directors (Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivaraman)**”, submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.



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Certificate

This dissertation titled “**New Directions in Contemporary Indian Scenography: A study of the works of three contemporary theatre directors (Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivaraman)**”, submitted by **Dharm Prakash**, Theatre and Performance Studies, School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.

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Introduction

This dissertation aims to study contemporary Indian scenography through the works of three significant theatre scenographers/designers who also work as directors: Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivaraman. It examines the intervention made by new visual idioms (visual materials, lighting and new media), multimedia and technology in contemporary scenography. This is an attempt to find out the relationship between scenography, material, space and acting, spectator and how the relationship transforms the reception of theatre in our time. In the present situation, actors are facing new challenges as they have to engage with virtual entities, which may not have physical forms. With such interventions, theatre is going through a whole new transformation in forms of sensual experience, viewing, acting and designing. What is happening now is: *while actors are doing theatre (representation), materials are performing*. This dissertation will try to capture some of these complexities.

I investigate how do Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivaraman have different approaches while they use similar kinds of materials? How their scenographic works interact with contemporary socio-political issues and how socio-political issues and the new economy transform their concepts of design and scenography. This study is first of its kind on contemporary Indian scenography; therefore my attempt is also to develop a vocabulary of scenography research. I would like to examine these questions by using semiotics, performativity and postdramatic theatre approaches.

Scenography includes all the elements that contribute to establishing an atmosphere and mood for theatrical presentation and visual communication.¹ This may include use of multimedia and technology, music, set, costume design, space as well as body (actor and spectator) but is not limited to these aspects. Despite its relevance to understanding politics and aesthetics of performance through '*visual material*'² and

¹ According to Pamela Howard (2002), scenography not only deals with scenic design, but also with the stage artist, which includes the actors and spectators.

² Visual material stands for the element (raw material) that come in the creating a representational reality.

‘multimedia’ and technology, scenography has remained one of the most complex areas of research in Indian theatre. Thinking in terms of movement, space, visual materials, it would be difficult to understand theatre without the aspects of scenography. It does not have its independent space in script-centric modern Indian theatre dominated by the dramatic theatre. Unlike acting and playwriting, scenography is still in a very experimental stage in India. I have observed that not only scholars but practitioners also do not give much attention to scenography. This is not to deny that the nature of scenography has not changed over the years. In recent years, scenography has emerged as an important element to think through and analyses theatre productions in more inclusive and complex ways. For all such reasons, the study of scenography becomes important in Indian theatre scenes.

Contemporary scenography deals with visual and sensorial composition and the kind of meaning-making that cuts across various registers such as semiotics, and (material) inter-textuality. There is a close tie between scenography and dramaturgy. A new trend has emerged in contemporary scenography in which scenographers are creating dramaturgy through images and movements. In a recent seminar titled ‘Is the Playwright Dead’ (LIT Fest 2014), writers and practitioners like Sadanond Mennon, Anuradha Kapur, Satish Alekar and Neelam Mansingh have recognized these changes and argued that how image, movements and a series of other interventions are replacing the idea of dramaturgy. Anuradha Kapur referred back to Stanislavsky who said, ‘people come to the theatre to hear the subtext, they can read the text at home³.’ The subtext becomes live through object to action in scenography. Kapur argues that in such scenography, action drives the word rather the word driving the action. Scholars have discussed how acting has changed the language of modern Indian theatre by placing actor at the center of performance and reducing the role of the text as part of dramatic theatre. I will argue that apart from acting, scenography has played an important role in the breaking of the hierarchy of the text-centric modern Indian theatre. However, there

³ LIT Fest 2014, Organized by NSD. Lit for Life is an annual literary festival organize by the English daily The Hindu, India. The festival was inaugurated in 2011 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of The Hindu’s literary review.

are several studies on the changing nature of the scripts and acting. There are literally no such works that could have analyzed the role of scenography in Indian theatre. I take the scenographic works of three contemporary directors and their works: Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivaraman to analyze performance in contemporary Indian scenography. The scenographic works of all three directors/scenographers engage and reflect different issues.

In this dissertation, for me, the major challenge would be to understand the creative process in which a scenography is worked out. In this regard, Parker W. Oren argues that each designer tends to develop his/her own method of reaching the inner reservoir of creative ideas and the designer's individual struggle (2009:41). As we know scenography is not a decorative thing but it is inherent to the idea of theatre and with its production process. It works as a sign system, which is important to understand the politics of performance. But to become an important aspect of theatre practices and scholarship, this aspect of theatre needs to be asserted. The similar was the case with *mise-en-scene* which had to assert its legitimacy, and prove that it was neither unnecessary decoration nor a derivative and arbitrary discourse. It had to prove that it was an art in itself and not the servant of literature (Pavis 2013:17).

This dissertation aims to examine the role of scenography in the changing relationship between actor and spectator, actor and acting and spectators and their experience of viewing. John Willett and Ralph Mannheim (1976, P- 341) offer an interesting example from German playwright and director Bertolt Brecht's production where the intention was to 'show that you are showing.' It is through design that Brecht was effectively able to 'articulate this idea of alienation effect'(1976:341). That could only become possible through scenography and achieved through techniques that would prevent the spectator from getting trapped in the 'illusionistic world.' This dissertation aims to take scenography as a serious area of research in theatre in particular and performance in general. It examines the connections between designer, performer and spectator and how design becomes connecting elements of theatre.

Contemporary scenography has the power to create a unique narrative journey in space and time with the help of technology. Moving images, digital spaces and mixed

media environments may be used to create illusions and construct unpredictable worlds distant from any realistic representation of life. A digital environment becomes a medium, which can set new rules for the performance art. Recent technologies have encouraged the fusion of direction and scenography by creating not only a new visual notion in the theatre, but also unique experiences for the spectator and the performer as well.

I have attempted to explore and understand contemporary Indian scenography through four key words- visual idioms, liveness, intermediality and seeing as an experience. In the Seventeenth Bharat Rang Mahotsav (2016), I have observed a shift in contemporary scenography from physical reality (from the use of ramp, chair and other objects) in performance area to virtual and visual reality (use of light, graphics and video). In this context, Arnold Aronson has discussed the future of scenography. He forecasted that in future 'perhaps actors will be beamed onto the stage by transporters and all tangible scenery will be replaced by holograms' (2010: 84-88). His statement raises several questions. For example, how new materials are going to work in performance area? Whether they are helping actors to convey their emotion? Whether they are part of the actors? What are the experiences of spectator? How spectators are associating with this visual reality? These are some of the important questions which I explore in this dissertation.

Scenographers have different views on the definition and constitution of scenography. Many theatre directors also see scenography as limiting and reductive. For example, Josef Svoboda was in the view that scenic elements often suppressed the action of the performers which were traditionally considered as the central component of theatre. He argued how this led to a shift in audience's attention from the actor and his action to the images (1960:19). In a similar tone, in a seminar on scenography at NSD, Robin Das argued against the multimedia scenography. He was not ready to accept multimedia scenography as a scenography because in his view this scenography is not helpful for actor. According to him, actor is the main protagonist in theatre. Sadanond Menon has also expressed the similar view by arguing that someone like Robert Wilson can make play with two actors and forty-eight technicians and use high

technology to create impact. He termed these experiments as the anti-theater which shows a new position of visibility and a new relationship with audience. But in contrast to these views, Christopher Baugh argues that multimedia scenography is one of the best artistic language for stage representation, it directly hits spectators and it provides full liberty to explore gestural language' (2005:126). The debates ask us to think scenography in relation to actor and scenography and scenography and spectator at the level of emotion and meaning making.

As far as the question of selection of these three directors/ scenographers is concerned, I am not taking them as the representative of contemporary Indian scenography. There are many practitioners who are doing interesting works across different regions of India. My concern here is to capture the new shift and trend or new directions in scenography through the works of these three directors/ scenographers. One of the major reasons of selecting these three directors has to do with their use and employment of materials. They include (visual materials, multimedia and technology) but with different approaches. Arguably, they have been trying to cross the boundary of 'theatre' and exploring new possibilities of expression and communication through 'intermediality' approach of scenography. They have been using some interesting visual material on stage like animal flesh, salt, electric goods, plastics, mirror, and fire and have been trying to explore some new idioms and meaning. They can break the space horizontally as well as vertically with innovative ideas. This flexibility is quite new in the field of scenography. They are also working with artists from other genres, like painters, sculptors, installation artists, musicians. They are working in theatre space as well in other space like exhibition gallery, park, and lawn and 'alternative spaces'.

Abhilash Pillai has been using multimedia technology, visual materials and music in his scenographic work. In *Peer Gynt* (2015) (Henrik Ibsen) production, he had used waste plastic, electronic goods and distorted videos and salt on floor. Using these materials, he tried to create fantasy in performance space. Anuradha Kapoor acknowledges that she is more interested in theatre design than direction. Most of her directorial works are heavily depended on collaboration and brings different genres together. She has collaborated with visual artists, painters, musicians and filmmakers,

including Arpita Singh, Bhupen Khakhar, Madhusree Dutta. Her plays are episodic in nature. The episodic nature of her plays also gives a scope to create collaborative theatre. She creates visuals and images which need complicated technique and various mediums like video, painting and sculpture. Deepan Sivaraman is recognized for his new intervention in Indian scenography. Unlike other designers, he has been using the term scenography in much more articulated ways. He experiments with different kinds of materials, graphics, videos, music and so on. He explores alternative space and converts them to performance space through these materials.

2

In the introduction, I have observed the literature that analyses the various thoughts given by different scholars on the term ‘scenography’. The development of scenography in theatre has been highlighted in this part. It also focuses on the development of Scenography in contemporary Indian theatre which is the central point of research. Before going to the debate of the contemporary Indian theatre, it should be the best idea to at least know what the term ‘scenography’ is.

Howard’s book *‘What is scenography?’* gives some important hints to understand it. Howard has mention in her book ‘scenography is the seamless synthesis of space, text, research, art, actors, directors and spectators that contribute to an original creation’ (Howard: 2002, P-130), she has been confirmed that it is not only deals with scenic design but also with the performing both on and off the stage, she even goes on to refer the spectator as an integral part of scenography. In the introduction of the book she confirms her idea as below:

Scenography is always incomplete until the performer steps into the playing space and engages with the audience. Moreover, scenography is the joint statement of the director and the visual artist of their view of the play, opera or dance that is being presented to the audience as a united piece of work (2002: xxiv).

Magdalena Holder supports Howard’s affirmation as he writes “It is perhaps symptomatic that neither scholars nor critics make a clear distinction between set design

and scenography, and so the interactive aspect of scenography in a theatre performance is subordinated to the inventory of its material parts (2005:6-7). Scenography actually seems intuitive and illusory to distinct interpretation established on respective characterization. Holdar makes his point clear by stating that ‘scenography constitutes all aspects that contribute in shaping spectator’s knowledge and perception of the space that is relevant to plot, play and performances’ (2005:8). The opinion is further supported by Arnold Aronson who asserts that ‘scenography carries a connotation of an all-encompassing visual-spatial construct as well as the process of change and transformation that is an inherent part of the physical vocabulary of the stage’ (2008:7). Jarka Burian has classified this opinion by stating that:

The goal of scenography cannot merely be the creation of a tangible picture [...] and in itself (scenography) is not a homogenous totality. It separates into a series of partial elements, among which certainly belong form, color, but also tempo, rhythm-in a word, the elements that are the disposal of an actor. And it is precisely by means of these elements that the scene enters into close contact with the actor, becomes capable of dynamic transformation, and can advance in time just as a stream of scenic images created by the actor performance. It can transform itself synchronously with the progress of the action, with the course of its moods, with the development of its conceptual and dramatic line (2013:126).

According to Holdar, the term scenography has been derived from the Greek words *skene* means ‘scene’ and *graphein* means ‘to write’. It is thus scenography can be interpreted as ‘to draw for the stage’. It is very important to mention that there is always a state of bewilderment between scenography and stage-design. In process of theatre production, theatre architectural sketch is commonly handled by the scenographers. In a theatrical production the one action is linked with another in a way to accomplish dramatic experience as a whole. It is the scenographer who controls the

various scenographic features in a manner that the audience is provided with a unified experience through different elements of a theatrical production. It is very important to mention here that a scenographer can be of a great assistance to the actors performing on the stage as their roles could be interpreted more appropriately by adequate use of scenographic elements. While explaining the duty of a scenographer Howard maintains

[...] the scenographer has a responsibility to do all that is possible to achieve the best understanding of the delicate and complicated process of making a theatre work, involving the director, performers, other visual artists and the technical team (2002:xxiv)

Holdar believes that scenographer is the co-auteur' of the performance, a co-creator whose work is difficult to totally separate from the work done by the director (2005: 21). To execute his responsibility in a satisfactory manner he should have an intensive reading of the script and accurate understanding of its interpretation. Apart from the script he is also expected to well known to the space provided to him at the state for scenographic analysis. As per the guidance of scenographer the empty space on the stage can be maneuvered according to the director's approach to the production. Adeyemi adds his ideas stating, 'it is the duty of the scenographer to study the script, visualize the technical details as they relate to the performance venue, characters, movements, objects in space, overall mood, and historical period of the play, furniture and stage properties, costumes as well as lighting' (2006:117). Staub has widely examined the idea of how a scenographer's endeavor supports a director to fill the vacuum of "quotient of intrinsic energy" (2009:82) directed the actor, which slowly diminishes as the play moves forward. He even goes to the extent of believing that the work of a scenographer has the capability to make the audience stick to their seats and appreciate the visual quality of the play even if there a weak performance by the actors and he "no longer believes any statement the actor makes" (2009:82). As per the above discussion it is evident that the scenographer has a great influence on theatrical production. In the next sections, I would like to discuss some of those points.

There is a whole history of development of scenography in the world theatre from Greek theatre, Elizabethan theatre to the 19th century modern theatre. There is no need to include such historical development of scenography in this research work. But I would like to capture the development of theatre design or scenographic work through three significant theatre directors and theatre designer in the history of scenography. They are Adolphe Appia, Edward Gordon Craig and Josef Svoboda, who had been revolutionized the concept of stage. They have also received some significant criticisms because of their lacunas. Aronson has analyzed some of the views of the critics regarding spotlights and electric lights as he mentions that ‘the critics objected not only to the instruments per se, but to the disruption caused by the harsh white light in the midst of the yellow effulgence of the gas-lit stage’ (2008: 36). The use of gas light had received a lot of appreciation but it has its weakness as well. It was not convenient for the audience as by its use the temperature of the auditorium and the atmosphere used to unbearably hot. The safety was another concern as there were incidents where clothes of actors use to catch fire.

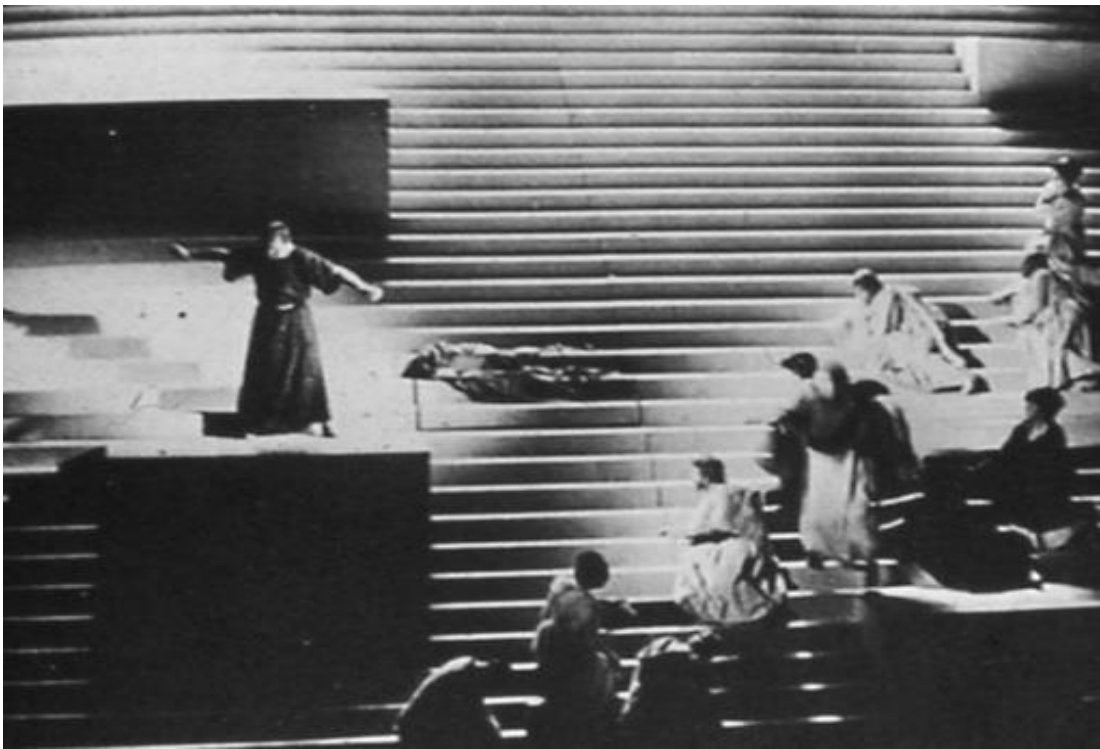


Image I *Hamlet (1912)* by Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig

Aronson explains the modern design ‘started with the theoretical writing of Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig, starting with Appia’s work in the 1890’s (2008: 15). Previously the two dimensional scenery was mainly used in theatres. Practitioners ‘called for a theatrically characterized by simplicity, suggestion, abstraction, and grandeur within the context of a three-dimensional sculptural setting that would unify the performer and the stage space’ (2008: 15). His interpretation of light and shadow has been widely appreciated. In view of Ronald Harold Wainscott and Kathy Fletcher, Appia created designs that featured strong contrasts, and he experimented with ways to create shadow dynamically in the theatrical space’ (2004: 369). Bentley adds that ‘when a shadow is pitched by the light it “has a sculpturesque” quality that by the vehemence of its definition, by the balance of light and shade, can carve an object before our very eyes’ (1997: 33) and in this process the director comes out to controlling the scenography. He therefore has used electricity as the chief medium for his scenographic researches. He focuses on the three dimensional range of scenery styled ‘in terms of sculpture’ (Aronson: 2008, P-32). Appia laid much stress on the use of music in theatre and believed that it is the most essential ingredient to get the expected result out of the performance. He thinks that music takes charge to arrange ‘all the elements of scenic presentation into a completely harmonious whole in a way which is utterly beyond the capacity of our unaided imagination’ (Bentley: 1997, p-29). He continues to outline the routine practice of music in Appia’s production that:

As music released the mood of a scene, projecting the deepest emotional meaning of an event as well as its apparent action, so the fluctuating intensities of light could transfigure an object and clothe it with all its emotional implications (1997: 35).

By doing this he has simplified lot of issues in theatre regarding scenography. Bentley states that ‘the modern stage is filled with the light that was always to be seen on land and sea but never in the theatre until Appia brought it here’ (1997:39). Bentley while talking about one of the major contributions by Appia notes that ‘he divided lights on the stage into two systems- diffused or general lights, which merely flooded the stage

with an even radiance, called the flood-lighting today, and focused, mobile light, now known as spot-lighting' (1997: 42). In future he removed foot lighting considering it outdated and replaced it with the strip lights. Aronson explains that:

For exterior settings, the light will always come from above save (*sic*) for some few exceptions; the height of the characters is taken as the maximum angle and all comes from the same direction. For the interior setting the light will enter very obviously through the openings (never horizontally) reinforced extremely subtly by footlights or by special instruments to provide diffused light (2008: 41).

As the lighting was being thrown from various sides and angles it gave a sense of natural light and most of the visual imageries appeared real. Simultaneously this innovation inspired the researchers and designers to develop the modern day stage lighting. A light designer not only controls the motion of the play but also is able to stimulate the desired emotions by administering it accordingly. Appia's light, 'created the illusion of light from a knowable source that obeyed the rules not only of physics but of ordinary human observations (2008:34). In this concern, Gordon Craig and Appia 'began to focus attention on the director as the master-artist of theatre, the stage was set for regarding the script as a pretext for production – as one element of equal weight with design and performance' (Wainscott and Fletcher: 2004, p- 338).



Image II *Hamlet (1912)* by Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig

As a director Craig laid stress on the importance of role of the dramatist in a play and ‘provided the preeminence of the director as the only way to implement synthetic ideals of the theatrical performance in which all the different art forms are integrated to create a single emotional harmony’ (Akard and Isakson: 1983, p- 4). He had great admiration for famous writer Henry Irving who at that time worked as actor manager as well. Appia’s theory of use of music in theatre was disbelieved by Craig and he advocated inclusion of dance in a theatrical performance. He claims that it was the dancer who introduced drama through dramatist and ‘the dramatist made his first piece by using action, words, line color, and rhythm, and making his appear to our eyes and ears by a dexterous of these five factors’ (Bentley: 1997, P- 115). Craig adopted a different style than that of Appia and Svoboda while creating his set designs as he ‘returned to simplicity and suggestion rather than detailed evocation of the real’ (Wainscott and Fletcher: 2004, p- 352). However his designs were criticized for being away from the realism. In this aspect Hartnoll states that he ‘endeavored to build up an imaginative stage-picture, with no concessions to reality at all, by the use of large screens lit by colored lights’ (1991: 482).

Josef Svoboda can be considered one of the most productive and progressive scenographic designers of his time. He created special effects by using projections in a performance and “sometimes shot through multiple scrims, creating intriguing distortions of window effects” (Wainscott and Fletcher: 2004, p- 373). He brought a complete change in representation of setting, outlook and landscape of scenery on stage. Wainscott and Fletcher while discussing his stage setting note that he

[...] combined platforms, three-dimensional scenery, and open space with still projections screens; mixed film with still projections; and mastered the art of projected scenery [...] with aid of modern computer-generated imaging for both lighting and sets in creating designs as well as executing the designs on stage, the possibility for theatrical designs seem nearly limitless (2004: 354).

He got great admiration for his designs for Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*’ and *As you like it*’ by Shakespeare. He set an extremely large staircase and the actors performed on its different platforms. While setting the design for *As you like it*’ he used projections to bring the variations in the setting without changing the platform actors performed on. He is appreciated for ‘use of mirrors, projecting the live actions of both performers and presumably of the audience’ (Prihodova: 1960, p- 6) for his scenography in the production of *Intolleranza* (1960). He was continually in ‘search for the intangible essence of a work and his attempt to express it in the most appropriate manner, on the stage, in theatrical terms, which, for him, implies a synthesis of expressive elements’ (Burian: 2013, p- 125). Oni notes that Svoboda ‘based his work more on a metaphoric rather than realistic approach to design’ (*Trends and Considerations* 54). Making properties move in motion on the stage by projection is the primary objective of Svoboda as it ‘must not foreshadow the action or provide a summary illustration of it’ (Burian: 2013, p- 123). He agreed that ‘theatre means dynamics, movement’ it is a living thing’ therefore, scenography should not be fixed and tell at once, as expressionistic design tends to do’. (2013: 125). Richard Foreman

and Christine White are two main scenographers of that time who were seriously concerned about development of scenography. However Aronson found Foreman's scenography 'ugly' as he thinks the 'homemade quality of his sets and the generally somber colors were conscious attempt to thwart the usual slickness of commercial production, which he felt lulled the audience into complacency' (2008: 25). He adds that his stage setting includes the 'juxtaposition of incongruous elements and the mixture of objects wildly differing scales'. Even though Foreman did not receive, he had a great impact in theatre of the late 1960's and 1970's. Through his work he outlined the objectives of those who asked for the 'hidden work to be shown, who felt the production process should be present in the product, and who felt the resulting production should attract attention to itself as the deconstruction of its process' (Scarpetta and Dolan: 2013, p- 24). He is often recognized for displaying hidden scenography in his design. He thinks of the scenography space as:

[...] is never a given beforehand, it doesn't constitute a set frame on the interior of which the action would be able to unfurl; it modifies itself unceasingly – particularly in its dimensions – in proportion to the evolution of the action [...] the set is likely to become hollow or shrink, to well or contract, to divide or multiply (2013: 26).

These designers gave new direction to the scenographic movement. Their contribution has extended the scope of scenography in theatrical world as well as in technical approach comprising of stage design, light, costume and properties and in acting space too.

3

As we know the term scenography is new in Indian theatre. It has influences Indian theatre recently. This does not mean that Indian theatre did not have scenographic elements in its practices. When we look back to Indian theatrical and performance traditions, 'Sanskrit Theatre', folk performance, ritual performances, it has

reach tradition of scenic exploration. The Indian traditional theatre has been mostly based on 'environmental scenography'. Similarly, folk performance has its own indigenous, ethnic, cultural and environmental identity which varies from societies to societies. It has its own landscape, site (like temple courtyard), objects and materials for makeup, musical instruments and performances style. In this context, Suresh Awasthi has suggest that, 'scenography is non-realistic and the stage is usually bare space manipulated by actors through the use of stylized and symbolic make-up, costume, mask, music and the gesture as well as codified gate⁴. They use every scenic elements that is based on its social, cultural and indigenous knowledge and environmental availability or we can use the famous academia term 'theatre of roots' (they use every visual elements from its own root). This is the politics of identity, how the particular society and community making its own cultural differences, indigenous knowledge and Identity using these scenographic elements. 'Bharat Muni' in his 'Natyashastra' describes scenographic element of Indian classical theatre in chapters. In this description, there is also mention of nine types of rangmandapa proscenium arch) with thick descriptions of measurement, contractions and uses. The text also describes about music, mask and scenic elements. Prof. Satyabrta Rao has referred that Bharatmuni's, 'Natysashtra give much-more materials to understand the importance of scenic elements in Indian theatrical traditions⁵. In the introduction of the book 'Looking into the Abyss: essays on scenography' by Arnold Aronson has wrote that 'interestingly, the Sanskrit treaties on theatre, the Natyashastra, which is in essence, one of the first discourses on reception theory, devote several chapters to the spatial and visual components of the theatre. Bharat Muni understood the importance of the physical theatre, and the entire Veda is an exploration of the way in which each and every component of the theatre contributes to the reception and understanding of the drama' (2008: 3). It can be said that Indian theatre had its own scenographical method, style and communication. In modern period, Parsi theatre made important interventions

⁴ Awasthi, Suresh. "The Scenography of Traditional theatre of India ." *The Drama review TDR*, 1974: 36-46.

⁵ Rout, Satyabarta. "Scenography In Indian Theatre ." March 31, 2012: Blog Mandli.

in theatre design. The theatre was always trying to cater more audiences. It experimented with scenography with the use of new technology such as revolving set, box set, actors were flying and so on. This was the period where scenography (theatre design) saw some experiments and also a break from traditional theatre.

Scenographic intervention of National School of Drama (NSD) in Indian theatre, Ibrahim Alkazi, the first director of the NSD led some new experiments in the field of space and design. He tried to explore theatre space, alternative space, and scenographic possibilities in productions like Dharamvir Bharti's *Andha Yug* in 1963 at Firozshah Kotla and Purana Qila, Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* at Purana Qila, Mohan Rakesh's *Asadh ke ek Din* at NSD. . After him many other NSD directors and practitioner did some interesting experiments in the field of theatre. This includes contribution made by Robin Das, Amal Allana, Nisar Allana, Maya Rao, Neelam Mansingh and so on.

4

In my research, I have used semiotics, performativity and affect approach to analyses these works. For semiotics, Elaine Aston and George Savona recent works (2013) have offered some entry points and openings, Erika Fischer-Lichte's work (2008) and on performativity and the *Affect Theory Reader* (2010) has also helped me in problematizing this relationship. Performativity helped me to understand the creative process in which design works and meaning gets interpreted. Affect theory may help to deal with various aspects of sensual, emotional as well as psychological relationship between scenography, body and space. Some of these design works are also creating a moment of postdramatic shift where various genres merge and it becomes difficult to locate theatre on the basis of text or actors. Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic theatre* (2006) approach has helped me to examine some important aspects of that design. I have tried to observe works and workshops of these directors, conduct interviews with them and interact with their process in a participatory approach. The primary source of my research is their works which I am planning to observe during their rehearsals and shows. I have observed around twelve plays (I intend to take Abhilash Pillai's *Black*

Orchid (2007), *Midnight Children* (2014), *Helen* (2007) and *Peer Gynt* (2015), Anuradha Kapur's *Antigone Project* (2002), *Virasat* (2013) and *Sahib 409 Ramkinkars* (2015) and Deepan Sivaraman's *Peer Gynt* (2012), *Spinal Cord* (2009), *Ubu Roi* (2012) and *Dr. Caligari* (2015)) as part of my case study.

5

In the first chapter (Lighting and materials as new visual idioms: which is an exploration of new materials, techniques and aesthetics), I have discussed materials and light as new visual idioms. The chapter discusses how these materials create sensual and emotional experiences through 'selective visibility'. It discusses materials and design through mood, emotion and motivation. This chapter examines how these elements evoke certain emotions, experience and unexpectedness. For instance, Abhilash Pillai mostly uses theatre lights⁶ and materials like white metrics, wasted electronics goods, different types of fabrics, plastics, and salt and so on in his production. Anuradha Kapur in her latest production *Ramkinkars* (2015) and *Virasat* (2013) has preferred materials like water, food, fire, soil and so on. Her materials keep transforming during the performance. Deepan Sivaraman has been using visual materials such as moving bed, chair-table, and fire even moving light like candle, mashal, motorcycle light and other alternative source and so on in his production *Spinal Cord*, *Ubu Roi* and *Dr. Caligari*. He never uses fixed set; he always prefers moving object and tends to break the difference between set and props. This approach helps him to create surrealistic scenography. Such scenography directly impacts the spectators and also offers interesting space to actor to explore the possibility of his own body.

Chapter second (Mediation through Multimedia and Technology) explores intervention made by multimedia and technology in scenography. How multimedia is transforming physical reality on stage into a virtual space. Why the use of technology and multimedia is seen as a threat to the liveness of performance? Does the use of multimedia and technology necessarily distract the spectator and detract from the art of theatre as presence? Can we think about more combined approach? What are the

⁶ For example, PAR Can, Fresnel Light, Spot, profile, Disco light and LED baby.

challenges one is facing to direct and design in an increasingly multimedia-tiesed space. This chapter explores all these questions in the light of the works of three directors. For example, Abhilsh Pillai has used a lots of multimedia and technology in his production *Black Orchid*, *Midnight Children*, *Helen* and the recent production *Peer Gynt* (2015). In *Black Orchid* he has used multimedia (projection, graphics, image and videos) and technology (disco and graphics light) to create a type of virtual reality. Anuradha Kapur has used multimedia and technology in different ways in which most of the projection and technology are projected on actor's body. In 2003, she collaborated with film maker, Ein Lal for her play *Antigone Project* (2002). In the first scene, Antigone laments the death of her brother at a heap of sand, which then goes to ten minute movie by Ein Lal on *Godhra Riot*. Deepan Sivaraman has used video and image in *Dr. Caligari* (2015), *Spinal Cord* (2009), *Project Nostalgia* (2014) to convey the inner filling and emotion of actor. In *Spinal Cord* (2009), he has used operation theatre videos where the doctor cuts human flesh. Through this videos he create whole scenario of hospital where life and body are treated as an object. I examines the links between the use of multimedia and technology in the creation of scenographic statements on stage. Broadly, concentrating primarily on the convergence of multimedia and technology, this chapter explores new ways of approaching these components which are changing the language of theatre significantly.

Chapter third (Collaborative Explorations: reformulating the new space of scenography) in the new scenographic works, space has undergone a radical transformation. In many recent productions, directors and scenographers are leaving the proscenium theatre and using new spaces like art gallery, lawn, park, and other alternate space. For example, in 2012, Abhilash Pillai created a new theatre space (alternative created space with circus artist) and he collaborated with circus artist for his production called *Clown and Cloud*; Anuradha Kapur has been using art gallery and other alternative space. Similarly, Deepan Sivaraman has been using lawn, gallery and store-room in productions like *Spinal Cord* (2009), *Ubu Roi* (2012), *Project Nostalgia* (2014) and *Dr. Caligari* (2015). This chapter explores scenography and its impact in the light of changing space. Most of these directors/designers are doing collaborative

work for such productions and their works can be read as collaborative explorations. This collaborative exploration gives powerful visual language to theatre combining various independent units of film, videos, music, painting and sculpture. It often creates a mise-en-scene on stage. This chapter examines how the fourth wall is breaking and creating more participatory kinds of space. It also examines the impact of the new space on actors' body. What were the limitations of earlier space that necessitated such demands? This does not mean that new space does not have its problems. The chapter also explores the politics of gallery space and alternate space.

Chapter 1

Light and materials as new visual idioms: An exploration of new materiality, techniques and aesthetics

1.1. Introduction

In the time of interdisciplinary practices, scenography plays a crucial role in the exploration of new materials, technique and aesthetics in the theatre and performance art. Many scholars and practitioners are in the view that theatre is a hybrid form of art. It means theater includes various disciplines, or materials, lights, technique that might not be part of one discipline. As a theatre practitioner, I believe that all possible materials that is available in the universe can be used in theatre and performance arts following the demand of an *'Idea'*. I am using the term 'idea' not only to represent text, play and drama. I believe that contemporary theatre has potentials to convey its meaning, affect and emotion through material, light, colors and by using multimedia and technology. Therefore, the 'idea' can be any form of text, image, and scenography, dramaturgy and so on. Materials and lights are one of the most significant elements of scenography. Scenography might not be possible without these elements. Each element of theatre and performance is important for the purpose of scenography. In this consideration, materials become a significant element in theatre and scenographic practices.

This chapter discusses how these materials create sensual and emotional experience through what I will say, 'selective visuality'. In this chapter, we will attempt to understand materials and light through, placement, interaction, social value, mood, emotion and motivation. This chapter also examines how these scenographic elements evoke certain emotion, experience and unexpectedness in theatre and performance practices. By placing these materials, basically light and material, I explore the politics and aesthetics of material and materiality in performances. Before going to make any broader claim, it would be a good idea to characterize the term

‘material’ and ‘light’ in the context of scenographic. My employment of the term material in this chapter always suggests ‘visual material’ in the arena of performance. Material could be in any form and any shape like set, costume, props (wood, lather, mud, plastics, and garbage) and so on.

Here I would like to introduce the respective works of the Abhilash Pillai’s *Peer Gynt* (2015), *Helen* (2007), Anuradha Kapur’s *Virasat* (2013), *409 Ramkinkars* and Deepan Sivaraman’s *Dr. Caligori* (2015), *Ubu Roi* (2013) around which I am intended to explore this chapter. I have mainly focused on Abhilash Pillai’s production of *Peer Gynt* (2015) and *Helen* (2007) through the aspects of lighting and materials. I would like to see how the director has used different types of material and lighting for the purpose of expression, communication and meaning making process. Pillai has directed and designed some of the renowned plays like *Peer Gynt* of Henrik Ibsen. He has adopted the play in Indian context and collaborated with Koodiyattam performer for its production. This play is experimental in nature. He uses different types of materials (alternative material) such as electronics wastage (e-garbage), plastics, and different types of fabrics to create a fantasy. He has created a character through electronics wastage, which was moving on the stage with a human body. With this experiment, Pillai was able to create a natural environment that is now a days getting rapidly crushed by electronics wastage, plastics and garbage materials. He has symbolically warned the society through the character (which was created by electronics wastage) danger for the future generation. The production warns us about the environmental degradation and upcoming danger which gets symbolized through the featured garbage.



Image- I. *Peer Gynt* (2015) by Abhilash Pillai (A representation of human character along with another character made by electronic wastage)

In *Peer Gynt* (2015) production, Pillai has used theatre light i.e. often alternative light with different colors, patrons, intensity, angles and selected visibility to communicate or express character's mental status, inner conflicts and their social and political status in society.

Helen (2007) by Abhilash Pillai was a play about war for oil, because of oil politics, attack on Iraq and Afghanistan by the United State of America and allied forces of England and France. Pillai adapted Greek tragic play Helen to work with the theme. In this production the tragedy of war on terror is shown from Helen's the point of view. The performance was troubling. 'Tikrit' is important, as it reawakened human memory and was prepared to stand authentication to the world that the complete war was about terrorism. 'The whole project was in trying to discover the missing connection between Iraq and Afghanistan the war on terror. It was as if the Pentagon caught this fairy and stashed it away in a cage for the entire world to see. Like the Emperor's new clothes, anyone who missed this enigmatic creature was

relegated as Enemy of Freedom, Saddam Sympathizer and Horror of Horrors’ (Pillai: 2012, p-324). The Play queries the foundational allegory in which the manipulation of power put an end to the individual. Helen is an abstruse entity like oil and its world politics or a super (sensuous) woman or a land of super promises with pseudo-ideological appeals.

This experimental production tried to deal with the complexity of world politics, where a super power is trying to destroy the nation for the interest of big corporate and capitalists’ interest of oil. In the name of war on terrorism, the USA and its ally has created an environment of Islamophobia. Pillai’s production tried to engage with this complex politics through symbols and different types of material. He also experimented with light and sound. He also used plastics dolls, oil, LED lights, glass, plastics and sewing foams and so on.



Image- II. *Helen (2007)* by Abilash Pillai

In this production he has carried out intensive experiments using theatre light with a combination of warm and cool light using gobo.¹ In this experiment, the space

¹ Gobo is the lighting instrument used for creating different types of shade on floor.

keeps transforming and often becomes static, through this experimental lighting, his space (floor) keep transforming, according to the demand of the idea.

Anuradha Kapur is recognized as a leading experimentalist theatre director. In most of the cases, she collaborates with artists from varied genres, such as with painter, architecture, sculpture, musicians, filmmaker and folk artists and others. For this analysis, I would like to consider her some important productions, *Virasat (2013)* and *409 Ramkinkars (2015)* for analysis where she has extensively used materials and lighting. *Virasat (2013-14)* directed by Anuradha Kapur was a play that moves between many registers to unfolds the evolving history of a family in contemporary India by mirroring the social and cultural shifts that mark the twentieth century. The play was written by Mahesh Elkunchwar. It tells the story of Deshpande family based in Dharangaon, Maharashtra. From *Old Stone Mansion*, to *The Pool*, to *Apocalypse*, we follow the fortunes and struggles of the Deshpande family who was once highly respected and well-off landed gentry. The family is now caught between the memory of their own genteel past and the financial penury of the present. As generations come to terms with their past and future in drastically different ways, we see an image of India negotiating its way through tradition and modernity.

In this chapter I explore this play through the use of space and of experimental, creative and innovative use of light and material as new visual idioms of theatre. This experiment has a lot to do with the meaning making process. The production was realistic in its approach. Kapur has used mud, fish, iron sheet, water and other household things on the theatrical performance space to create a fluid journey of characters. To create this scene, she mainly used daily uses (particularly household) materials to engage the performer in the real manner. Regarding her selection of materials, she said, 'I do not want, my actor to act/ perform the work, I want they experience the work' (Kapur, Interview). As a spectator I could feel that sense at least the way actor was cooking and serving the food to spectators. They were also washing and stitching cloths in an extremely realistic ways. Her materials on stage keep transforming during the performance. It can be said that the material was

performing in the performance. One can see raw rice becoming *bhat* (cooked rice)), wood is turning into fire, smoke, water is boiling.



Image- III. *Virast (2013)* by Anuradha Kapur

The moment minutely captures Kapur's use of materials and lighting along with Deepan Sivaraman's scenography. The intensity of light getting low which shows the fall down of Deshpande's family

Kapur's other production, *409 Ramkinkars* is an intensive collaborative work of Vivan Sundram, Anuradha Kapur, Shantnu Bose, Rimli Bhattacharya and Aditi Biswas. The performance has used an alternative space/ site-specific space in Indra Gandhi National Center for the Arts (IGNCA). The collaborative practice proposes the aesthetics of installation as a prompt for theatre and theatre as a prompt to comprehend an installation. As the site-specific installation is characterized and modeled according to space and architectural plan, design and scenography have to follow the construction, theatre functions in that space as *mise-en-scene*. The placing of sculptural forms, the manifestation of the spectator's within an immersive atmosphere and other such factors make installation art and theatre art as a

collaborative project. The collaborative project often becomes an interesting engagement of material performance. Anuradha Kapur in her case used subaltern and realistic (fish, coconut fibers, cement) materials which makes this project can be the best expel of the material performance. She has been huge subaltern and realistic materials, which make this project more inclusive, it includes the peoples, who have not space in mainstream performance and debate.

Used materials in this case materials was more performantive, which activated different types of sensations. The sensations were able to address the aesthetic approaches and choices of the actor and spectators. In a scene, a performer is attempting to chop a fish. First the actor tries hard to chop it; blood is coming out with strong smell of fish. Many spectators have been watching keeping handkerchief on their nose and mouth. I could see after watching for a while a spectator just runs away. This can be seen as an efficacy of material in the performance that has been activating both the actors and spectators. By putting these acts, the director's aim was to break the notion of beauty that has its hegemonic presence. The performance piece seems to suggest that a particular material may be ugly for the people but for someone it may have different connotation altogether. The performance piece can be also viewed as an act of incorporating 'inexperienced' material on the stage as well as the incorporation of 'tastes' of marginalized communities who did not find their space in mainstream aestheticized performance.

The play *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligori* is an adaptation of German expressionist film of the same name. Set in a town called Holst Enwall which is in the grip of a series of gruesome murders, the play follows Francis as he tries to uncover the truth about a mountebank and his ever sleeping companion. The story of Holst Enwall unfolds through layers of visual narratives slowly peeling off to keep you on the edge of your seat.

Calligary offers a possibility of looking into the layers of human mind, which is always floating, never certain and complex in nature. It can be contextualized in the sense that institutions around us try to regiment our minds and make sure that we all

walk in a regimented straight line. Because of the complexity of the subject that the film is based on, it allows us to explore the possibility of telling the story in a multilayered fashion. As far as the production process is concerned, it started five months before as part of classroom workshop exercise. The workshop encouraged students to experiment the spatial configuration between audience and performer. The dramaturgy and scenography of production evolved simultaneously working in this particular site which was a rundown warehouse and now converted into a performing space. In this performance, he attempts to explore the possibility of total theatre in which various aspects of theatre such as scenography, dramaturgy, actor's performance come together to make it a 'total' experience. (Production brochure, 11 May 2015, 8:30 show)

In this experimental production, Sivaraman uses different types of materials like mirror, moving box, piano, glass, iron boxes and motorbike light. He has used water colour, huge puppet and candle light. The production has created a surrealistic environment with use of these varied materials in coordinated ways. The scene takes spectators in discomfort zone. The scenography was able to create the scene of the horrified situation of the place (Holst Enwall, Germany), where this serial killing was happening. In this production, he has used controlled lighting to establish the situation.

Alfred Jarry's sensational play's *Ubu Roi* (2012) was adapted and directed by Deepan Sivaraman in 2012. Sivaraman also did scenography and dramaturgy for the production. Sivaraman rejected the conventional theatre architecture and chosen National School of Drama's lawn for the performance. He transformed the space into a concentration camp (performance space) lined with electric wires. The rows of bulbs hang on and shine upon the audience seats. In the old text, the French playwright Alfred Jarry satirizes political power, greed and exploitation of his time period. Sivaraman adapted the play in context of contemporary political scenario to show the dynamics of politics, corruption and coups. The character Ubu Roi is a corrupt president who is very fat; he use to eat so much without even thinking about

society. This was main conjunction where Sivaraman links corpulence with corruption.

Sivaraman has used colossal material in this performance and alternative lighting source. He used water, fire, and fire gas along with different types of fabrics, masks, motorbike, iron wire, masks, puppets, iron pillar and moving sets and props in the performance arena.



Image- IV. *Ubu Roi (2012)* by Deepan Sivaraman

Through these materials and alternative light he was able to establish the image of a corrupt state along with its oppressive concentration camp. At the end of the performance, he used fire on the performance space where a globe is put on fire. The act symbolizes revolution against corruption and the state who are trying to control the power through armed forces or concentration camp. The production was a comment on the contemporary political power and how it has militarized many parts of India.

1.2. Material in theatre and performance

Before going to the contemporary Indian theatre, I would like to discuss other theatre practices where materials play a vital role. For instance, materials play an important role in Indian folk theatre and performance. Regional folk theatre brings different kinds of materials following community's occupation and regional location. In the north-east regions, Indian folk performers use bamboos, stones, woolen clothes, and leather and pipe instruments. In south India, folk performances from that regions use coconut leaves and different types of metals and so on. Bertolt Brecht has wrote a wonderful poem, which is about material and human relationship.

Each item

In her stock is hand-picked: straps and belts

Pewter boxes and ammunition pouches; hand-picked too

The chicken and stick which as the end

The old women twists the draw-rope

The Basque women's board on which she bakes her bred

And the Greek women's board of shame, strapped to her back

Which holes for her hands to stick through, the Russian's

Jar of lard, so small in the policeman's hand; all

Selected for age, function and beauty

By the eyes of the knowing

The hand of the bread-baking, net-weaving

Soup-cooking connoisseur

Of reality. (Brecht, 'Weigle's Props' 427-28)

In this poem Brecht captures various aspects of material and human relationship. It is evident that Brecht employ 'real material' (appears real) that carries theatrical meaning to the performing area with its own social, political, economic and cultural impositions or with the values. The poem is a celebration of human and material relationship and , how both (material and human) give meanings and values to each other and also how they share their 'lives' in performing area and outside of it. This can be equally viewed as a celebration of theatre/performance itself where this exchange takes place. The relationship animates and inanimate life and culture. In the history of theatre and performance, materials were always present alongside the human performer and actor. We can see the relationship in the use of mask in classical Greek and Roman theatre. Likewise, props and special effect were extensively used on the Elizabethan stage. The use of elaborate costumes became the trend in the eighteenth century theatre and realistic theatre design in realism and naturalism. In Indian context, theatre is full of usage of gorgeous headgears, ornamented costumes, makeup and so on. In more recent period, use of painted curtains special effects and props and minimal use of material in Peoples' theatre, Third theatre are some of the examples that capture the moments of time-period.

When we look into the process of performance making and its reception, the role of materials is generally ignored. Materials have potential to explore the questions of agency and wider social relationship. Materials remain at the margin with its lifeless presence and passive responses. We can see that role of materials goes beyond decorative purposes or to create artistic atmospheres for a performance. Materials are seen as secondary against texts and actors. As a theatre practioners, I think that materials has capacity to play an active role in the complex and multilayered performance dynamics. Above mentioned directors Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivaraman agree with this view In fact, Kapur has even claimed that materials is more powerful element in theatre and performance than other elements. In her view, materials convey multilayered meanings than actors on stage (Kapur and Sivaraman, interview).

When materials are placed in time and space then it may take part in shaping and defining that space. Materials have huge impact on human users. Human and material relationship in this context can be viewed as dialectical rather than hierarchal, mutual rather than subordinate which initiate meaning, language and complications. My attempt in this chapter has to show the relationship between human and materials which manifest in different modes of performance. The relationship also echoes the real relationship between human and material in a real social life. The modes of performances are placed within the well planned theatre; we know very well that almost every performance is sharing space with visual art and performance arts. The materials are aggressively present within those frames and structures in many ways. Sometimes materials are intertwined with the presence of human performers. According to my experience in theatre, in most of the cases directors, designer and actor see material through the actor's point of view. They do not see actor through the materials point of view. This contradiction inevitably raises the issue of 'objectification' of human, seen as a state and as a necessary process that occurs in a time and space under certain condition of a performance. We see objectification as a negative term or ideological frameworks because it devaluates human experience. Here I am proposing an alternative reading of objectification. Such objectification may work as productive dynamic in a theatre making process that takes part in constructing the self and its relationship to others. The objectification, like Brechtian alienation can work as a positive process of generating performance values helpful for a critical evaluation of human experiences. The process of creative production shared between subjects and materials turn objectification into a key notion to analyze the relationship in a creative context.

1.3. Materials and Light as New Visual Idioms

1.3.1. Light-

"I shall bear in mind all the different possibilities for expansion and transformation that modern technology can supply..." -Adolphe Appia

Stage light is one of the most important component in theatre and performance design or in scenography, in other word contemporary theatre cannot exist without light. As we know that light is not only a medium of visibility but it is also a powerful medium of visualization. In other words, we can say that light reveals what needs to be shown. In contemporary theatre, light is the only artistic equipment through which scenographers can control a running performance. In performance, light coordinates the way to project materials, object and actors to the spectators. Light becomes a director of its own right that dictates direction for each and every material in performance. Undoubtedly, light has strong impact on scenography. For a good production, many things now depend on light designer who must also be a good collaborator. Light designer often works with director and scenographer.

For many directors and designers that first concern of the light is visibility. That is true. But as a theatre practioner, I feel that the first concern of light is also related to darkness. It is because without darkness there is no importance of light (especially in context of theatre light). If something is 'visible' it means there are many things that are not visible. And this idea of visible and invisible is not simply a game of switch-on and switch-off light, it is much more than that in theatre and performance practices. In this regard, Birgit Wiens argues that "in front of the audience's eyes, the performers' bodies and the material elements onstage were transformed (and almost virtualized) by the atmospheres and movements of an ever-changing 'performing' light". (Wiens: 2010, P- 26). Light has a boundless impact on visibility. It creates, intensity, contrast, color contrast and contrast in directions and angles in a performance. In other word we can say that light not only illuminates the performance, it is a medium of artistic expression through affects. Light establishes a relation between the visual aspects of the stage and supports the dramatic intent of the production. One the most important functions of light is to reveal theatre in its full capacity, in its three-dimensional form of, the mode of the scene, and the composition of the stage. Garden Craig in his lighting technique used a single color back cloth with a gauze stretched at an angle in front of it onto which light of another color was

projected “an astoundingly three dimensional effect was achieved” (Christopher Innes: 1998, P- 46)

This thesis observes the appreciation of the aesthetics of the stage lighting as an agency of verbal communication and meaning making in theatre and performance art. As a communicative art, theatre blooms basically on verbal (dramatic theatre) and non-verbal (post dramatic theatre) communication. It produces meaning in many more communicative ways, sometimes it work as symbols, characters, text and so on. In our theatre practices often the practitioners and spectators carry a misconception that the center of communication in drama and theatre is ‘written word’ and other elements are merely associative of it. However, artistic support such as scenographic art (costume, make up, stage lighting and sound and so on) is equally vital theatrical element. Often light and design is merely seen as decorative element in theatre practices and even in theatre scholarship seen by most the people in the schools of theatre as decorative arts. I argue that apart from word and actor scenography, use of light and materials are directly involved in the meaning making process. They are significant part of the verbal communication of the theatre, performance and visual arts as well. Merely written and spoken words do not stand as theatre and performance art, theatre involves several other elements. Arguably, theatrical communication is a combined communication of text, actor and scenography. This chapter attempt to explore the aesthetics of the light and material as a communication, meaning making in the theatre and performance realization of the particular directors and scenographer Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivaraman’s works.

Contemporary Indian theatre is passing through a new phase with new social condition. The theatre is engaged in new kinds of experience and experiments with materials, light, new media (multimedia), space and neon technology. It is observed that contemporary directors and scenographers are more sensitive to design; they are accepting it, engaging with it and using it to make profound and layered statements. According to Steve Diction, “digital performance is an extension of a continuing history of adaptation and adaptation of technology to increase performance and visual

art's aesthetics effect and sense of spectacle, it's emotional and sensorial impact, its play of meaning and symbolic associations, and its intellectual power" (Diction: 2007, P- 40). Abhilash Pillai, contemporary theatre director expressed a very similar view in an interview by saying that 'multimedia and technology are playing very crucial role in the creation of a new experience; it is one of the best medium to explore meaning impact-fully' (Pillai, Interview). New media and technology are helping the practitioners to create a new aesthetics that is really have not been experienced in 'theatre and performance space' by the performers and spectators. The new directors are trying to break the tradition of conventional theatre by presenting theatre or performance that is really democratic with its own elements (scenography). But this is not only to do with the distribution of materials on stage but also bringing inexperienced materials on stage. The new experiments have been trying to bring the experiences and expression of different castes, communities and societies. We can say that contemporary scenography has potential to bring the real material on performance space, where new kinds of aesthetics, emotion, expression and affect can be brought out.

To understand politics and aesthetics of contemporary theatre performance, it is important to understand the performance and distribution of light and materials on stage. However, there is lack of study in the field of scenography and it has remained one of the most complex areas of research in Indian theatre. Similarly, scenography cannot be understood without understanding the various aspects and dynamics of light and materials. Unfortunately, these materials do not have their independent existence in the script-actor centric Indian theatre. Unlike acting and playwriting, scenography (light and material) is still in very experimental stage in India. I have observed that not only scholars but practitioners also do not give much attention to these significant components of theatre and performance practices. This is not to deny that the nature of contemporary Indian theatre/scenography has not changed over the years. In the works of Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivaraman's light and material has emerged as an important element to think through and analyse theatre production

or conceive meaning in a holistic, more inclusive and complex ways. For all such reason, significance of material and light becomes influential in meaning making process. In this regard, Parker W. Oren argues that “each designer tends to develop his/her own method of reaching the inner reservoir of creative idea and the designer’s individual struggle” (Oren: 2008, P- 41). As we know well scenography (light and materials) is/are not a decorative thing but it is characteristic to the production process. It works as sign system, which is important to understand the politics of performance. Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivaraman has said in her/his interview that the importance of scenography (light and material) need to be asserted to make it as part of contemporary theatre and performance discourses. This similar was the case with *mise en scene* which has to “assert its legitimacy, and prove that it was neither unnecessary decoration nor a decorative and arbitrary discourse. It had to prove that it is an art not in itself not the servant of literature” (Pavis: 2013, P- 17). Light and material create a new kind of relationship between director, designer, actor, light and spectator, actor and acting and spectators and their experience of viewing. John Willett and Ralph Mannheim offer an interesting example from Brecht’s production, where intention was to “show that you are showing. It is through design that Brecht was effectively able to ‘articulate the idea of alienation effect’” (Willett and Mannheim: 1976, P- 341). That could only become possible through light design and use of particular material in particular seen, or through angle, intensity, color and particular light effect or the placement of particular material on the particular space on stage or in performance area. It could only be imaginable through scenography and achieved through techniques that would prevent the spectator from getting trapped in the ‘illusionistic world’.

Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivaraman use different types of light and materials, for instance, Abhilash Pillai mostly (not only) uses theatre light² and materials like white metrics, wasted electronic goods, different types of fabrics, plastics, salt, fire and different types of symbolic goods like dolls, glass and

² For Examples, PAR Can, Fresnel, Spot, Profile, Moving head, LED and Baby Light.

so on. Anuradha Kapur in her latest production *409 Ramkinkars (2015)* and *Virasat 2013* preferred materials like water, food, fire, soil raw fish, and coconut fiber and so on. Her materials keep transforming during the performance. She trying to give spectators feel of real as real as possible. Deepan Sivaraman has been using visual material as moving bed, chair-table and fire, brick and real material to spectators make belief. He uses different types of light instrument like moving light candle, fire torch (mashal), motorbike light and other alternative lighting source and so on in his production *Spinal Cord (2009)*, *Ubu Roi (2012)* and *Dr. Caligori (2015)*. He never used fixed set; he always prefers moving object and tends to break the difference between set and props. This approach helps him to create surrealistic scenography. Such scenography directly impacts the spectators and also offers interesting space to actor to explore the possibility of his own body.

1.3.2. Selective Visuality

As a communication art, theatre is a blend of action and thought either spoken or unspoken. The essence of theatrical performance reveals through the means of this blend of thoughts and action. The character in performance is not absolute; there should always be a co-relation between the character and the world outside (locality/environments). Theatre is considered real if it involves various aspects of human emotion, material with its materiality. This is the reason why theatre is also known as replica of life. I am not agree with the view of many practitioners and researchers that theatre is a mainly aversion of dramatic art. I would like to bring Hans-Thies Lehmann here who criticized this paradoxical thinking of theatre and performance practices in his famous work, *Post-dramatic theatre*. He argues that, “intermediality, the civilization of images and skepticism towards grand theories and meta-narratives dissolve the hierarchy that had previously guaranteed not just the subjection of all theatrical means to the text but also the coherence among them” (Lehmann: 2006, P- 56). Post-dramatic theatre breaks this hierarchy of dramatic theatre. The fundamental of postdramatic theatre is and it makes theatre as a

*'democratic art'*³. This post-dramatic theatre/democratic theatres an essential dream is the 'non-hierarchy of images, movements and words' (Lehmann: 2006, P- 84). Contemporary theatre can be viewed as a form of postdramatic theatre which forms a texture that resembles collage, montage and fragment rather than a logically structured course of events. The audience of such theatre view visual as well as effusive experience through light, material, music and so on. Even in its basic, light, material and sound are essential to theatre and cinematic art. However, theatrical theories like minimalism and Jerzy Gortski's *Poor theatre* argue how the expression of a 'theatrical production becomes indomitable by the use of stage lighting and material of the dramatic action' (Benedict Binebai & Kenneth Efakponana: 2014, P- 17).

Stage light and scenic design are some of the most important accessories to obtain a vastly ranged implication of script in the perfect order. Researcher of stage lighting Duro Oni strongly believes that the 'theories and principles of a modern aesthetic of theatre production, particularly in stage lighting and scene design have performed the bedrock of contemporary stage lighting and selection of visual material (2004:238). He suggests incorporating the idea of plasticity on performance space through light and its materiality, material and its materiality as well as a correlation flanked by the parts of an artistically successful theatre production and the relationship between creativity and human progress as important consideration in scenography.

The process of simplifying and expressing clear meaning/meaning making of the symbolical and significant elements within the environment of the performance by the use of lighting and material as a communicating tool has been acknowledged by Deepan Sivaraman's productions like *Dr. Caligori* (2015, 2016), *Spinal Cord* (2009)

³ I as a theatre practioners strongly believe that, post-dramatic theatre has potentials to provide autonomy to each and every element of theatre and performance art/scenography and practioners (Dramatists, Director, Scenographer and other genres artist such as Painter, Musicians, Film-maker and so on) as well.

even in his latest production *'The legend of Khasak'*⁴ (2016). As discussed above, stage lighting, visual materials are some of the most important meaning making devices of theatrical production. When stage lighting and materials are used in the language of communication it gives a lucid and precise picture of the words spoken in a performance. Stage lighting and visual materials create an imagery of the terminology used by developing the clear meaning. As light functions to place, outline, trace and activate the environment within the performance area into an involuntary organism.

Being an old and widely accepted form of art, theatre expresses joy sorrow, depression, hope, construction and destruction of life. A theatrical stage is a platform that helps us to understand various philosophical ideological ideas along with political systems worldwide. These observations and explanations have become more effective and impactful with the use of light and materials as new visual idioms on stage. In his book *Stage Lighting*, Richards Pilbrow writes that, "light becomes a living form of energy that surrounded the living actor, shaping the stage picture and completes the process of making a live environment within which the actor can perform" (Pilbrow: 2010, P- 14). In the contemporary Indian theatre directors and designers are using light and material in the performance space with goal of providing spectators meaningful and effective understanding of reality. For instance we can observe Pillai's *'Helen'* (2007) and Sivaraman's *'The Legend of Khasak'* (2015).

⁴ The legend of Khasak is Deepan Sivaramana's latest production (Year). It is based on OP Vijayan's novel *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* (The Legend of Khasak).

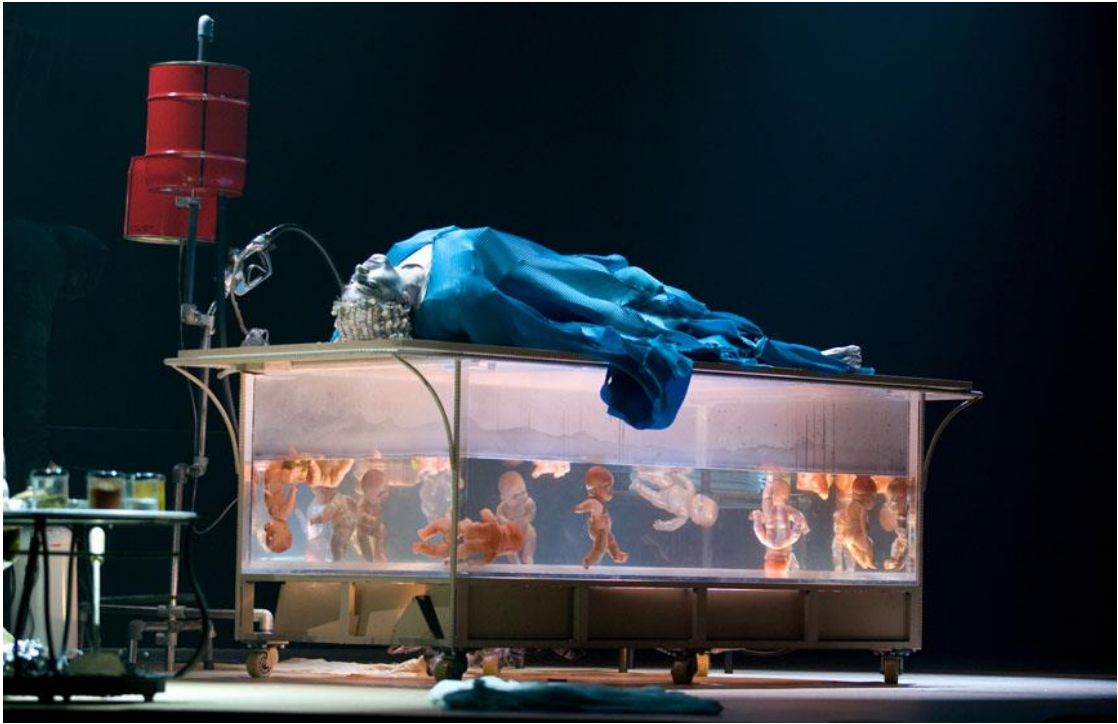


Image- V. *Helen (2007-08)* by Abhilash Pillai; performed in Japan



Image- VI. *The Legend of Khshak (2015)* by Deepan Sivaraman; performed in Kerala

These directors and scenographers' use of light and material have been context-specific. In their directions, light and materials is appropriated in various ways not only for the purpose of illumination but also as a form of revealing space, adding and hiding some spaces. Many times, light is used to illuminate and exclude actors as well materials. This defines, shapes and creates a momentarily of the acting space. But the most important thing to note about the use of the light and material is the director, designer and scenographer's intent to narrate a story in particular way. It can be also viewed differently in which a play gets interpreted through a particular focus which shows the intent of the play. Both the plays, *Helen* (2007) and *The Legend of Khasak* (2015) is anatomically configured in such a way that it gives strong provision for the manipulation of light and materials to reflect the various shades. The shades works as aesthetics statements on life and struggle of women in Europe and India. In case of Abhilash Pillai, he has created a meaningful image/visual theatre which discerns gender politics and hierarchy of gender in our society at the various levels. Through intricate scenography, Sivaraman was able to transport spectators close to the history of 'syncretic religious life of *Khasak* (2016) and retrieves the folk-Islam embedded in the cultural practices that the novel offers as a counter-narrative to current perceptions about Muslims' (Indianexpress.com:17/04/16). For this purpose, he has selected different types of 'real materials' (Sivraman, Interview) (soil, water, fire, smoke and different types of mask and fabrics) and lighting instruments (theatre light, fire torch, candle and so on) angles, colors and effect; that brings 'spectators close to the reality' (Sivraman, Interview) of a particular community and society. In production of *Khasak*, he has also incorporated indigenous folk dance, ritualistic performances and indigenous knowledge of the people. Sivaraman approaches theatre differently through the use of 'alternative theatre language which is meant for rural theatre community of Thrissur. In his production, he never tries to aspire for any universality' (Pillai: 2012). He rather believes that if his play can appeal to his own rural folk community, it will definitely have national and international appeal.

Abhilash Pillai describes the significance of the stage lighting in his interview as, the 'space to be anticipated is given its brightness by the lighting; stage

performances are only made visible by light' (Pillai, Interview). The basic function of theatre light is visibility, then it work as supportive element of the actor and it create mode, emotion and motivation through colors, angels, patterns and intensity and so on. The spatial representation produces a self-contained impression and the space stands in a unifying light. With the illumination of the whole scene a "unified character" is produced' in his performance (James Paul Gee: 2015, P-18). The uniform mood emanates from the space; for example, through a "muted" light. We can see that a three-dimensional space appears often as "charming" or as a fluid in individual structures of the performance.

Again, light and materials play an important role in Anuradha Kapur's theatre. Her scenography can be read as visual dramaturgy which tries to address the literal requirements of a play. She works on various aspects of design from light design, music design to material design in performance. It can be said that she prefers to design rather direct a play and performance. She said in an interview that 'scenographic elements, play text and actor are very much associated with each other (Anuradha, Interview)'. In play *Virasat*, she has used real materials of day to day lives; actors come on stage with vegetables. They wash clothes on stage. By using materials in this particular manner, she tries to activate senses of the spectators and performers. Kapur has been often using devices for activating the senses. For instance, for smell, performers were frying vegetables, use of *phenyl* for cleaning the floor. Real food was served to spectators to feel and react to the tastes. In her recent production *409 Ramkinkars (2015)* she has used similar types of materials and makes it obligatory. Besides acting and representing a character, actors also do their real work with real materials and real sound in real time (Kapur, Interview). In *409 Ramkinkars (2015)* she directs actors not to 'act' but 'react' with the use of real materials like fish, marble, food, cement and so on.

1.4. Elements of representation (theatre) and presentation (performance)

Contemporary Indian theatre and performance have potential to break the hierarchy of actors and texts in theatre. It is in capable of creating democratic space

and democratic distribution of sensibility through scenographic elements. In a contemporary theatre, scenography or image theatre or image dramaturgy has become really important to think about the new experiences of theatre. . Scenography elements play a significant role in the process of constructing a performance. Scenography breaks the boundaries of presentation and representation. Theatre can be both presentation as well as representation. It also tends to mix human world and spirit world in the realm highly creative performance. Every scenographic element becomes live and has its own potential to explore the complexity of our socio-political lives beyond textual interpretation.

The growing importance of scenography in contemporary theatre helps director and scenographer to create a visual dramaturgy through light and materials. All three directors and scenographers in my study were in the view that there are two ways to enter in the process of performance: First, according to the text and prescribed instruction of the playwrights and second, thinking through the improvisations with materials, music or some images, (scenography) keeping in mind the idea of a particular text (Pillai, Anuradha and Sivraman, Interview)'. All the three prefer to enter and initiate the production process through second way (through scenography/scenographic elements). They believe that when a child takes birth, first it observes the locality before speaking (verbal). It means visual always come first in our real life then verbal which has unnecessarily assumed priority in theatre. In the contemporary Indian theatre, visual has become a significant component; it opens up ways for actor to play or interact and make theatrical action more real, engaging and meaningful. Leading American theorist of media and visual culture W.J.T. Mitchell observes that these practices as a paradigm shift in the theatre/performance practices what he calls it as 'Pictorial Turn' (Mitchell: 1994, P- 15). Contemporary scenography deals with visual and sensorial composition and the kind of meaning making cuts across the various register such as semiotics and intertextuality (materials). There is a close tie between scenography and dramaturgy in this context.

A new trend has emerged in contemporary scenography in which scenography are creating dramaturgy through image and movements. In a seminar titled '*Is the Playwright Dead*' (LIT Fest 2014), writers and practitioners like Sadanond Menon, Anuradha Kapur, Satish Alekar and Neelam Mansigh have recognized these changes and shifts. Menon argued how image, movements and a series of other intervention are replacing the idea of dramaturgy. Anuradha Kapur referred back to Stanislavsky who used to say that, 'people come to the theatre to hear the subtext, and they can read the text at home.' The subtext now becomes live through object in action. . Kapur argues that in such scenographic contexts, action drives the word rather the word drives the action. Scholars have discussed how action has changed the language of modern Indian theatre by placing actor at the center of performance and reducing the role of text as part of dramatic-theatre. I will argue that apart from acting, scenography has played an important role in the breaking of the hierarchy of text-centric modern Indian theatre.

I have observed that Kapur and Sivraman's visual materials keep transforming during the performance. In Kapur's last production *409 Ramkinkars* (2015), it appears as actors were doing theatre and materials were performing. Chopping of fish by actor was turning into an event for both the actors and spectators; no one knew what will happen; whether blood will come out or not? When an actor was hammering on the red-marble, it was again an 'event' where no one knows what will happen whether the marble piece will break or not and if yes then in what shape. There were several of these examples which exemplify uncertainty in its core and marking an event in its action. One can observe similar things happening in Sivaraman's production. His use of light and materials keep transforming during the performance in a quite uncertain ways In his production of *Peer Giant* (2012), *Spinal Cord* (2009), *Ubu Roi* (2012) and his latest production of *The King of Khasak* (2015) light and materials create a series of 'events' that was really unexpected for the spectators and some time for the performers as well. These series of event can be read as performance while it can be said that actors were still doing theatre.

1.5. Subaltern materials and Inexperience

Subaltern refers to the peoples who are socially, politically, culturally and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure in the society and country. The term 'subaltern' is derived from Antonin Gramsci's work on "cultural hegemony" (Walter L. Adamson: 1980) which recognizes subaltern classes as excluded from a society's established structure and norm for political representation and therefore they are denied the means by which peoples have a voice in their society.

If we understand materials and its meaning and values in relation to class and community then there are a range of materials outside of Indian contemporary theatre and performance practices. In social life, practitioners using leather, flesh, blood, garbage, shit and other wastages are still considered as untouchables in Indian caste based society. Indian theatre as a sacrosanct space generally does not allow these materials in performance space. But as we know there are many communities in India whose association with these materials are embodied. Therefore I would like to argue that by ignoring these materials in performance, modern and contemporary theatre practitioners are evading the serious issue of caste and untouchability in Indian society. We know that in Indian caste practices, dead animals are handled by Chamar caste. Similarly, gutter and toilets are cleaned by Mehtar⁵ community, leather work is solely done by cobbler castes and clothes are washed by dhobi caste. If contemporary directors, designers and scenographers are really trying to go closer to the reality, they need to bring those 'inexperienced' materials in their performance. Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivraman have been trying to include these materials in their scenography works. By doing this, they are trying to break the stigma or socially constructed taboos attached with these materials. Also by bringing these materials, they are also bringing a new emotion, sensibility, sensuality, affect and reaction in performance. Their performance overall is providing a new experience that exists in

⁵ Mehtar is an untouchable community of India, they also come under untouchables.

our society but remain inexperienced in middle and elite class theatre and performance.

Abilash has used gutter water in his production '*Son of Scavengers*'. *The smell of the gutter* takes spectator and actors in a discomfort zone. The particular smell is representative of a particular community and society. Similarly, Anuradha Kapur has used fish in her production of *Ramkinkars* (2015). The scenes in performance was creating a sense of uneasiness among spectators.

1.6. Conclusion

Thinking through contemporary Indian theatre and performance practice, I argue that besides texts and actors, light and materials play a significant role in meaning making process in a performance. The chapter identifies the use of light and materials as some of the important agencies in the communication of aesthetics in the theater and performance making. Using examples of (*Virasat* (2013), *Helen* (2007), *Son of Scavengers*', *The Legend of Khasak* (2015) the chapter demonstrates that highly symbolic and communicative role of light and materials in performance. Using light and materials, three important directors place the question of caste, gender, identity, hierarchy, state politics, and power relation and so on in a strong way. Light and materials also work as important artistic mediums and create a new kind of emotion, affect, reaction and aesthetics that I call as 'inexperienced' materials in theatre and performance space. The contemporary theatre directors have used 'marginalized' materials from society and to show hierarchy and new sensibility. The performance is able to establish a dialogue between marginalized community and main stream society through use of light and materials. Beyond the hegemony of text and actor, the creative manipulation of the idioms of light and materials transport emotional, psychological, cultural and political meanings to a deeper level.

Chapter 2

Mediation through Multimedia and Technology

2.1. Introduction

This chapter will examine the role of multimedia and technology in contemporary Indian theatre and performance practices. Along with light and materials, contemporary theatre is also experimenting with new multimedia and technology. While multimedia and technology help theatre practitioners to put complex ideas and break the limitations of the conventional theatre, they also create multilayered challenges for directors, scenographers, actors and spectators. This chapter tries to explore the field of multimedia and technology (new media) through the question of immediacy. The chapter discusses the opportunities and challenges that multimedia (new media) and technology offer to the contemporary practitioners. New media and technology have ushered in an enormous possibility to break the conventional theatre practices and start a new direction in contemporary theatre and performance.

In continuation of the previous chapter, I take three representative contemporary directors, designers and scenographers (Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivaraman) who are using multimedia (new media) and technology to analyze the theme. The use of new media and technology has come with new experience, emotion and visuality. This has serious influence on theatre aesthetics and its meaning-making process. The new explorations are also concerned with new methods of researching, performing, viewing and learning about theatre and performance through creative exploration of multimedia and technology. The idea of inexperienced materials remains equally valid in this new engagement. This study explores the role of the immersive virtual world, Kuksa and Childs call it '*Second Life*' (2010: 275-291) in an effective exploration of scenography, and in the process of creating and experiencing theatrical performances.

The Oxford English Dictionary (2006) defines multimedia as more than one medium of communication, artistic expression and designing or relating to applications which incorporate a number media, such as text, audio, video, graphics and animation, especially interactivity when we its use in the theatre or performing arts. Though one can also think about cyberspace (Internet or mass communication technology) as part of new media, I am not bringing it here for the discussion. This analysis rather focused on analogue and digital presentations of multimedia that are not web based. While analogue technology takes account of sound equipment, slide and film projection, digital technologies take account of computer produced video, soundscape, graphics, animation, images and kinetics tools controlled by performing body in theatrical and performance space. David Saltz argues that the digital technology (multimedia) could be further categorized according to its ability to react with performers and other elements on space. The two categories are linear multimedia and interactive multimedia. Linear multimedia does not react to performance in the theatre space. Its changes are activated by the computer operator, who operates under direction of scenographer. This form of multimedia unchanged in the space (it depends on computer operator) irrespective of the performance in the theatre space.

Interactive multimedia is approachable to stage action of the performers and other elements meaning, this type of technology changes its contents when activated by either the physical movements or by voice of the performer or light and sound elements on stage. The comeback can be either random or programmed in some way. In other words, “it is the live performance that creates the changes to the multimedia portal displays” (Saltz: 2001, P – 107-108). Contemporary scenography has the power to create a unique narrative journey in space and time with the help of multimedia. Moving image, digital space (virtual space) and mixed media environments may be used to create illusion and construct unpredictable worlds distant from any realistic representation of life. A digital media becomes a medium, which can set new rules for the performance art. Recent technologies have encouraged the fusion of direction and

scenography by creating not only a new visual notion in the theatre, but also a unique experience for the spectator and performance as well.

On the use of new media and technology, scenographers have different views. Some of them think that scenography is limiting and reductive to the idea of theatre. Peter Hall's asserts that "advance in technology have allowed for greater scope, potential and excitement but has also created potential problem in the cohesiveness of making theatre" (White: 2006, p- 105). In a seminar on scenography at the NSD, Robin Das¹ argued against the use of multimedia scenography. He was not ready to accept that whether multimedia scenography can be considered as scenography at all. Because in his view, scenography is not helpful for the actors. He still takes actor is the main protagonist in theatre. Sadanond Menon² was also skeptical when he said that someone like Robert Wilson³ can make play with two actors and forty-eight technicians and use high technology to create impact. He termed these experiments anti-theatre which shows a new position of visuality and new relationship with audience. In contrast to these views, Robert Lepage argued that "use of technology has been regarded as tonic for a complacent theatre. New media allows practioners to create a new form of communication and creative expression" (White: 2006, P- 109-110). Robert Lepage tried to communicate with today's spectator (mediatized) who are very close to multi-mediatized world, where human bodies operate through new media (multimedia). In a similar manner Josef Svoboda argued that "this union of art and science is essential and vital for our time. It provides art with a rational basis and helps us to carry our investigations further" (Oddey & White: 2006, P-110). In a

¹ Robin Das is an eminent personality of Indian theatre, he is known as the actor, director, theatre light designer. He works in many Hindi films, now he is teaching in National School of Drama since last 10 years.

² Sadanond Menon is a renowned Indian artist; he is a cultural journalism teacher, photographer and stage light designer. He also a known speaker on art, culture, photography and so on. He is a teacher at Asian College of Journalism and IIT Madras.

³ Robert Wilson is a contemporary American experimental theatre practioner, director, scenographer, and playwright. He has also participated in several international collaborative theatre project. Over the course of his wide-ranging career, he has also worked as a choreographer, performer, painter, sculptor, video artist and sound light designer.

similar tone, Ervwin Piscater in his own monograph *The Political Theatre* (1929) demonstrates how film was utilized in numerous ways in his productions: including isolated moving image interludes, documentary evidence, dynamic scenery, scene titles, and to provide commentary and meaning as a companion to stage events.

At the same time many directors, scenographers and philosophers have problems with using multimedia and technology in the theatre and performance space. It is also time that same time, many theatre practioners are very passionate with use of multimedia and technology in theatre and performance space. The debates ask us to think scenography in relations to actor and scenography and scenography and spectators at the level of emotion, affect, aesthetics and meaning making process. It also examines the relations between the use of technology and the creations of scenographic statements in the performance space. At the same time concentrating mainly at the convergence of multimedia and technology (new media). It shows a new path for working, if these medium (multimedia and technology) and assimilated effectively in the theatre and performance practices.

Many contemporary theatre directors, scenographers, philosophers are almost obsessed with use of multimedia and technology in the theatre and performance space. They open up a new way of artistic expression, creative possibilities and provide a huge canvas to experiment with these mediums of art and science; which blur the boundaries of other genres and arts; for instance Pillai's (*The Black Orchid, Helen* (2007-8), *Midnight Children* (2014), *Loren Epton*, (2015) and so on), Kapur's (*Virasat* (2014), *Antigone Project* (2002-3), *Naulakha and so on*), Sivarman's (*Peer Giant* (2010), *Spinal Cord* (2009), *Dr. Caligori*, (2015-16), *Project Nostalgia* (2014) and so on) production highly depends on collaboration with different genres of artists like painter, film-maker, musician, architect and animation and graphics artist. In this regard Svoboda said that 'production space should be a kind of piano, on which it is possible to improvise, to out any idea whatever, or to experiment with relationship among various component' (White: 2006, P- 110-111). The medium gives a technique to theatre practitioners to mesmerize contemporary spectators with a meaningful

theatrical manifestation that brings the world of art and science in the entertainment arena together as they have developed in the similar atmosphere. The new and its related discourse have been producing significant cultural changes in our contemporary society and theatre practices as well. While it has offered opportunity it also raises several challenges for contemporary theatre designers and researchers. Here it is significant to observe that how multimedia and technology can redefine the meaning and boundaries of cultural experience and develop new kinds of mediatized theatre and performance.

Contemporary Indian theatre has become a complicated mixture of paintings, collage, videos, music, sculpture and numerous new media (multimedia and technology). The intervention of new media has radically challenged the conventional language of theatre and performance art. Multi-media along with theatre has become a space to examine fast changing multi-mediatized environments of the social. Packer and Jordan (2001) argue that there are new possible texts of new media history, just as there are numerous possible paths through a network. They suggest two significant key-properties to understand the assessment of new media. New media as an amalgamation of creative form and technology and *interactivity* that allows users to manipulate the affect of their experience in media directly.

It is not surprising that our modern culture becomes multi-mediatized and innovative with the notions of virtual reality and virtual culture. We can see digitalization of almost every aspect of our contemporary society (sound, visual, sensual, touch). Manovich (1995:1) mentioned that our contemporary culture (digital culture) can be considered as an “existence of another virtual space, another three-dimensional world enclosed by a frame and situated inside our normal space”. Our contemporary world is surrounded by fictive/virtual (computer generated) surroundings, which has huge canvas and explores several layers of human engagements. This field of interactions includes medical science, aeronautics, market, education, sports, and exhibition and so on. Virtual reality is the replica of the real environments and imagined environments that can be experience in theatre and

performance space as the synthesis of real and virtual space. Sometimes virtual space and real body become the medium of the creating of a virtual world. For instance, Kapur in Antigone Project videos projects on the actors' body (*Antigone Project: 2002*). And so for a time actors become mediums of creating virtual reality.



Image-I *Antigone Project (2002)* by Anuradha Kapur

In this thesis I consider the term virtual reality as the parallel culture creating number of opportunities for creativity, experiments, communication and learning. Additionally, I treat the concept of virtual reality frequently in a literal way as a means that allows three-dimensional reconstruction and such a creation is only collaboratively possible.

2.2. Multimedia and Technology in contemporary Indian theatre

One of the main principles of theatre is representation; theatre represents the society creatively in theatrical and performance space. Spectators' understanding of the artistic interpolations of theatrical representation depends on the representation of

social reality within which every spectator is 'positioned to enact, and to experience effectively, spectators of the reality' (Guiraud: 1988, P- 30). In this sense, the widespread use of new media (multimedia and technology) are responsible for significant changes in performance making processes in theatre and performance. The use of new media (multimedia and technology) in contemporary Indian theatre gives an ample opportunity to spectators to communicate and interact with a world of digital theatre. This has also become accessible and comfortable with fast-moving and extremely mediatized contemporary culture. This mediatized contemporary theatre culture can be viewed as experiments and innovations in the light of the twentieth century 'modern' theatre where many theatre designers, directors, scenographers, theatre practitioners have designed spectacles in Parsi theatre, Bangla Theatre, Marathi theatre and so on. They used heavy technology for various types of theatre. Here I would like to place an example from Abhilash Pillai's *Lorum Ipsum* (2015) written by Rajesh Tailang, (Lorem Ipsum is a play in which Abhilash Pillai has tried to illustrate the dichotomy of experiences; the pain of sadness and the tears of happiness. The content of this play has different theories running behind flying, disappearance and the anecdote of mankind's aspirations for flying.

The aerospace industry is no more an elite travelling extravaganza. Registering the global economy common man is able to fly more rampantly from one destination to another in this present age and the memories of journey are becoming drier, and warm, for the sake of saving time. Possibly many people might have experienced similar emotions during their train journeys. Before the launching of aero planes we know how rich the experience of the mankind was when they travelled in a train or a ship for a lengthy period where their personalities got changed, acquired lot of knowledge and got acculturated.

Today we know how aero planes symbolized the wealth of a nation, at the same time; we know these aero planes need huge amounts of fuel for flying. And I think we are quite aware of the hegemony of those who have more oil and the war powers. Today these aero planes are becoming a weapon for attacking and shattering

the harmony of a nation. The intensity of turmoil created by a hijack or a pilot's death on board or machine failure not only counts for the fellow travelers in the flight but for their family members, relatives and parliamentarians of the nation in totality. "In a nutshell, the theories of disappearance of a flight could be sensible. It all sounds for mankind 'there is no one who loves pain itself, who seeks after it and wants to have it, simply because it pain'. It is like today's politicians annotating in their speech certain quotes from the 'puranic' text without understanding the actual meaning and content behind those lines"⁴. But quoting it for validates today's scenario.

When we theatre workers take a galley of ideas for human disappearance from a flight and scrambles it to making a light specimen, we try to replace meaningful context with emotional stories of passengers in the flight allowing viewers to focus only on graphic aspects such as acting, designing and visualization without being distracted by the content of them. The whole has developed from a series of improvisation by students from the idea of Rajesh Tailang and creative team. Is this gibberish play; for our conscience and thoughts in the era of privatization in the field of aeronautics? (Directors note from production brochure, 08-11 May 2015). In the production, he used moving images, videos and graphics to create a unique experience of flying in airplane. For that matter, he created the inside and outside atmosphere of an airplane. Details like how a passenger in an airplane feels inside an airplane was made possible with the help of new media (multimedia and technology). In a similar manner Deepan Sivaraman used video projection to express his artistic approach in *Dr. Caligari (2016)*⁵. He used video projection on the wall to enlarge or underline significant expression, inner emotion that otherwise could not be shown in a theatrical space and through the actions of the characters.

⁴ Lorem Ipsum (2015), Directors' note (production brochure, 8 to 11 may show).

⁵ For the description of the play see chapter first.

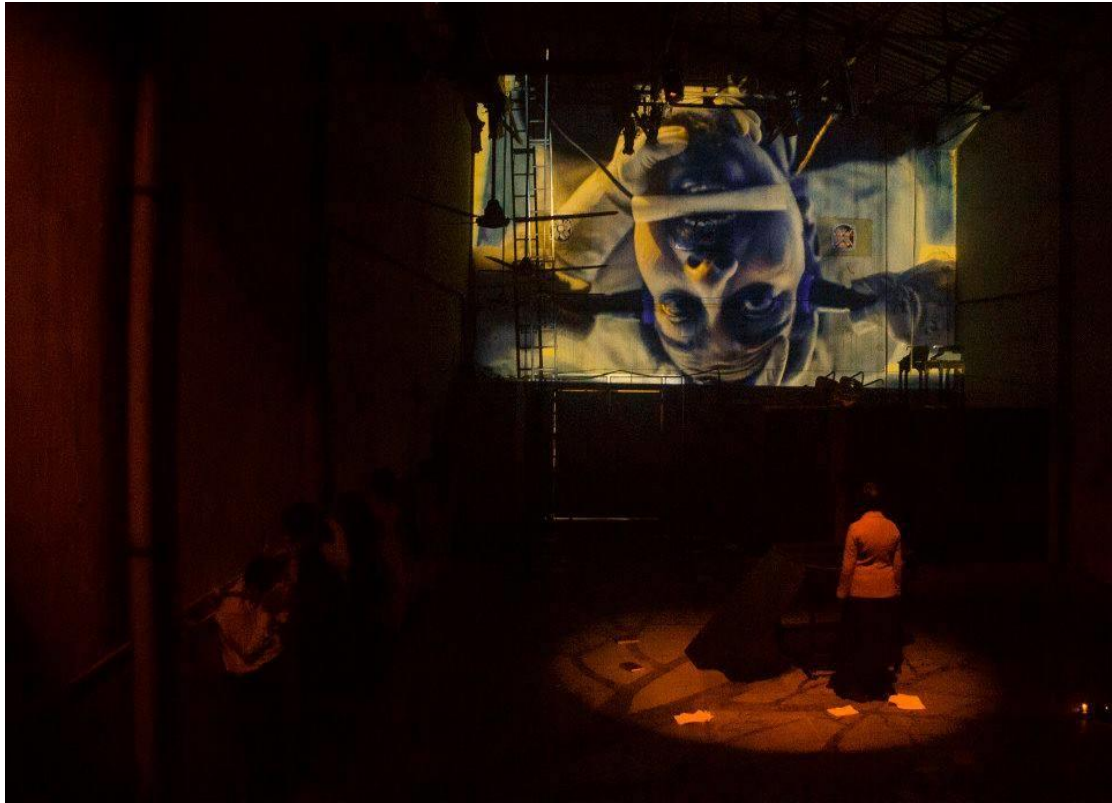


Image-II *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (2015-16)* by Deepan Sivraman

He created a surrealistic atmosphere with use of new media (multimedia and technology), use of innovative space, smell (*kerosene*) and taste. He tried to activate all senses of performer and spectators as well. This type of expressive multi-mediatized approach of the scenography has been increasingly becoming common among contemporary Indian theatre practitioners.

Contemporary theatre and performance is the artistic-combination of different mediums (multimedia, painting, music, film, sculpture, dance and so on) of arts and science, which in turns create immersive, interactive and communicative environment.⁶ Whatever are the concerns of contemporary practitioners, scenography (mediatized theatre/Image theatre/virtual scenography) is becoming strongly relevant in contemporary electronic culture and particularly in the field of ‘New media’

⁶Scenography is the seamless synthesis of space, text, research, art, actors, directors and spectators that contributes to an original creation (Pamela Howard, 2002:130). Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth expand upon this to suggest that “scenography is not simply concerned with creating and presenting image to an audience; it is concerned with audience reception and engagement. It is sensory as well as an intellectual experience, emotional as well as rational. (Joslin McKinney, 2009:4)

culture. One can debate that theatre art has several similarities with the virtual reality. But when we look back to the historical perspective, theatre practitioners have been using many such impressive and immersion tricks. Examples such as physical surrounding with fake perspective, panoramic view or wall painting to give a sense of landscape to immerse and illusionary world/ or fictive cosmos (Grau: 2013) can be seen as continuation. The efforts which were fundamental to theatre have radically transformed with coming of cinematography, computer technology and later on virtual reality. Gere (2002) further argues that multimedia proved to have a strong connection with artistic expression for example in the work of Abhilash Pillai's *Lorem Ipsum* (2015), *The Black Orchid*, *Midnight Children* (2014), *Peer Gynt* (2015), Anuradha Kapur's *Antigone Project* (2002), *Virasat* (2013), and *409 Ramkinkars* (2015), Deepan Sivaraman's *Peer Gynt* (2012), *Dr. Caligori* (2015-16), *Project Nostalgia* (2014) and so on. All the three directors create their work using artistic combination of various mediums (words, image, sound, light, graphics, videos, animations, painting, sculpture and so on). This is further complimented by the fact that theatre provides an ideal space for these experiments. Richard Wagner's speculation of drama fits here. He considered "drama and theatre as an ideal medium to unite all branches of arts" (Wagner: 2001, P- 69) with the intervention of new media and technology, theatre becomes a hybrid art or can be termed as synthesis of various arts. Wagner had a deep faith in experimental theatre art which creates a new visual language and aesthetics in theatre and performance space. Packer and Jordan refer to Wagner's approach as "one of the first attempts in modern art to establish a practical theoretical system for the comprehensive instigation of the art through the "tantalizing", synthesizing, effect of music drama – the unification of music, song, dance, poetry, visual arts, and stage crafts" (2001: XVIII).

Deepan Sivaraman creates performance according to the above approach. He attempts to create 'total theatre'⁷ or 'theatre of totality' through the use of various

⁷The German term Total Theater was first used in the mid-1920s for a form of theatrical presentation planned by Walter Gropius for the director Erwin Piscator (1893–1966). Piscator's approach was highly influential. He altered texts to suit his own ends and was the

expressive medium of arts. He challenges the conventional relationship between spectators and 'stage' (proscenium) and performance with the innovative uses of different mediums of arts and new media (multimedia and technology). Most of Sivaraman's theatre productions happens in alternative space. We can take the examples of *Ubi Rai* (2012), *Dr. Caligori* (2015), *The Legend of Khasak* (2015-16), *Peer Gynt* (2012) and *Project Nostalgia* (2014). The spectators primarily are seated in performance space. The spectators can feel the space and atmosphere of the space.



Image-III *The Legend of Khasak* (2015-16) by Deepan Sivaraman (Spectators are very close to performance space)

first to introduce film and animated cartoons on stage to speed up the action. He was in favor of spectacle to get his messages (often propagandist) across. The text was subordinated to effects which could be achieved by arresting lighting, music, dance, acrobatics, startling sets and costumes. All the mechanical resources of the theatre were put to use. Total theatre developed into epic theatre (q.v.). In France the concept of total theatre was put into practice by Jean-Louis Barrault in the 1950s. One of his notable productions was Claudel's *Christophe Colomb* (1953). More recently the Italian director Luca Ronconi has enlarged the possibilities of total theatre by involving spectators and audience in the action. For example, his travelling version of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1970). In England the leading exponent was Joan Littlewood at the Theatre Workshop. One of her most successful productions was *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1963).

Sivaraman allows rather prefers audience seating as close to the performance space as possible. His idea is to make the spectators feel the warmth of light, material and smell of the sweating actors.



Image-IV *Virasat* (2013-14 by Anuradha Kapur (Spectators are very close to performance space))

Similarly, Kapur also like to have spectators close to the performance space. In some of her performances, spectators were served food, fried vegetables in her performance. She wants her spectators to use tactile senses to taste and smell a performance. All of the directors want their audience to get immersed in performance. New media (multimedia and technology) rather help them to create that immersive environment with use of innovative idea and alternative performance space. In this regard, Pamela Howard has to say that scenography as inseparable from the actors and audience. In her book, *What is Scenography?* she observes that,

Scenography is always incomplete until the performer steps into the playing space and engages with the audience. Moreover, scenography is the joint statement of the director and the visual artist of their view of the play, opera or dance that is being presented to the audience as a united piece of work. (2002: XXIV).

From the above discussion it can be observed that contemporary Indian theatre scenography is changing the relation between actor and scenography (physical and virtual relation as well). It is also changing the relation between scenography and spectators and actor and spectators. Against this background, the study of contemporary Indian theatre asks us to examine and understand the presence of every unit of theatre in performance such as material, light, sound, graphics, animation, space (physical and virtual), performers and text in a democratic manner. Pillai, Kapur and Sivaraman have felt that with the presence of so many materials in consideration, theatre making process becomes challenging. Nature of theatre has been changing over the years because our contemporary society is also going through a remarkable changes by the intervention of the new media (multimedia and technology). As a researcher, we have to find a way that is based on 'inclusion', we can see that scenography is the central component for the composition, which is inclusive and democratic in the process of theatre-making. Howard makes this point by very clear by saying that,

The scenographer visually liberates the text and the story behind it, by creating a world in which the eye sees what the ears do not hear. Resonances of the text are visualized through fragments and memories that reverberate in the spectator's subconscious, suggesting rather than illustrating the words (Howard, 2002: 33)

Contemporary Indian scenography is creating a new experience (which I call it '*inexperienced*' reality in 'theatre and performance space'). Democratic in its nature and behavior, the categories of theatre and performance has been changing the entire perspective of the theatre making process. Sivaraman and Kapur said in an interview that "scenography" as an approach of theatre making is very convincing because it has potentials to experiment, explore and experience theatre making and 'production' (Kapur and Sivaraman, interview). Production here stands for complete performance, but many scholars believe that performance and scenography are always an

incomplete unit of performance. In theatre making process, some time they begin with music and in that case music becomes the center point of the particular performance. Sometimes material, props, image, videos, graphics or animation can become a central idea to begin a performance. The theatre making process is based on a reciprocal relationship between actor and theatrical elements, such as materials. Both activate each-other. Though many theatre practitioners believe that actor or performer can only activate the ‘materials⁸’ but I as a theatre practitioner felt that materials can equally activate actors and performers. Kapur is in agreement with this view (Kapur, interview). In this way, we can claim that theatre and performance making process with emphasis on scenography has become more democratic and inclusive in nature. The approach also has power to create something that remains ‘inexperienced’ in theatrical experience for director, scenographer, actors as well as spectators. I would reiterate that this could have become possible because of use of new media (multimedia and technology) and intermediality approaches.

2.3. Multimedia as a Transforming Agent

A new trend that has emerged in contemporary Indian theatre and performance characteristic is led by multimedia. New media (multimedia and technology) is increasingly replacing the physical reality of theatre and performance space into virtual reality. This trend of multimediatized theatre and performance has come with new challenges for directors, designers, scenographers, actors and spectators. In this regard, Arnold Aronson forecasted which I have mention in the introduction (Aronson: 2010, P- 84-88).

We know that theatre and performance are a moving art by their fundamental nature. Every ‘unit’ (character, time, space (location), music, emotion, action and text) keeps transforming in performance, often with transformation of space and time.

⁸Materials stand for the elements (raw material) or visual materials that come in the creating of representational reality.

The problem of the physical set is the issue of immovability. Many directors somehow managed this problem of immovability by designing performance floor in their productions. For example, Amal Allana designed the floor to suit the demand of *Natibinodni*. Similarly, Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry also designed floor in her production of *Blood Wedding* and Ratan Thiyam did same for his production, *The King of Dark Chamber*. The floor designs still remain static in nature in companion to multimedia technology. In conventional modern theatre, once the set design is done it becomes impossible to remove them. So suppose, if designers want to change the physical set, it at least take 5 to 10 seconds of blackout to do that; Hui Man Lua has address this issues in his Ph.D.⁹ thesis. He argues that ‘as the projected imagery on the floor changed along with the actions and mood, the characters were teleported through time and space. Abhilash Pillai and Deepan Sivraman have used this technique in *The Black Orchid* (2010) and *Dr. Caligori* (2015) respectively.



Image-V *The Black Orchid* (2007) by Abhilash Pillai (*Performantive Floor through multimedia and technology*)

⁹ Lua, Hui Man. *Digital Video Scenography: Scenic Design for Dead Man's Cell Phone*. Columbia: THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, 2011.



Image-VI *Dr. Caligori (2015-16)* by Deepan Sivraman, (Performantive floor)

“This instantaneous and fluid transformation of the space between scenes and locations became as theatrical as the fantastical encounters and events within the play, as well as making the performance space just as performantive as the performance itself” (Lau: 2011, P- 10). I will argue that new media and technology has given a new dimension of performativity in scenography.

Use of new media has whole dimension of theatre and performance. Physical set (physical reality) used to limit the imagination of the playwrights, directors, designers and scenographers. Playwrights cannot write ocean scene, railway platform scene or mountain scene, even if it is required. This is because it would be quite difficult to create such physical sets or physical reality of the real life. They all have to think in terms of a single location. Problems are also arising because of changing socio-political situation and significance of information services. In this new development, several boundaries are blurring, local culture and performance are getting globalized and global ideas are becoming part of the local culture. People are travelling a lot and visuals are dominating the scene. We always have images and information percolating in our mind. In friction of second thousands of images can

appear in front of our eyes. In this changing environment, I will argue that fixed sets are becoming too limiting to capture these images and movements. In this context, Reaney has interesting observation about contemporary plays,

These plays reflect current culture in that they are rich in information and use a multitude of visual images and multiple storylines. Information is typically presented in high-speed bursts and in pieces that have to be put together by the audience. They do not follow the more familiar and comfortable linear style of storytelling of the past. This new style of presentation is similar to the dissemination of information through electronic media and is suited to the talents of a population who can simultaneously watch two television shows and a football game while avoiding commercial breaks¹⁰.

Even in contemporary Indian theatre context, directors and scenographers are struggling with new found materials of new media and technology. Kapur for instance has used (a documentary film by Seema Biswas and Harish Khanna) videos projection in *Antigone Project (2002)*. The projection was a documentary film on Gujarat riots. The projection of documentary created a special relationship with spectators. Now for the directors and scenographers it was easy to draw some parallel between Antigone and Gujarat riots. In a similar manner Sivaraman projected operation theatre videos on the cyclorama in the 'Spinal Cord' where human bodies are treated as an object. The scene brought spectators in a discomfort zone.

Virtual scenography (digital scenography) is not only a video projection or some image or graphics projection in performance space. 'It is neither about simply replacing nor transforming a physical space into a virtual space, it needs to be rather

¹⁰ Reaney, Mark. "Digital Scenography: Bringing the Theatre into the Information age ." *Academia*. January 1, 2000. www.academia.edu/1807776/Digital_Scenography:_Bringing_the_Theatre_into_the_Information_age (accessed May 28, 2016).

viewed as creative engagement with various forms and materials. Improvisation remains a crucial issue of this making and therefore the issues raised during the improvisation' (Yildi: 2000, P- 295) needs to be addressed. Contemporary approaches of scenography are the exploration of the new emotion, aesthetics and experience through computer generated virtual environments. Sometimes the design also collaborates with physical scenography. The main focus of the contemporary theatre is the democratic 'interaction' with each and every elements of theatre agents (set, light, sound, actor and spectators and so on) in an interactive and intermediary fashion. In this context, Pelin Yildiz said that 'interactivity is the most important medium in communication technology. A visual communication method depends on visual perceptual requirements and contemporary approach in order to maintain interactivity' (Yildi: 2000, P- 295). As we know interactivity (new media is also known as interactive media) makes communication more inclusive and dynamic (text to image, sound, emotion to graphics, color and so on), it opens up a new space of democratic distribution to create a statements on theatrical and performance space, contemporary theatre can be viewed as an interactive multimedia composition. In this context, the intermedial effect of action and text, sound, and light, stage and costume design produced a highly complex art form' (Yildi: 2000, P- 295). Therefore, it becomes highly important that contemporary theatre and performance needs to be analysed in multidimensional and multilayered spatial contexts.

The explorative investigation of contemporary theatre and performance practices open a path to an *avant-garde*¹¹ scenography approach. Here, I would like to give an example from Pillai's production of *Midnight's Children* (2014). Pillai developed a unique style of scenography in *Midnight's Children*, where he created a combination of virtual space and physical props. Actors were playing with real physical props (bicycle, kitchen, and so on) in virtual space.

¹¹ The *avant-garde* (French word) theatre means experimental or innovative theatre practices. Literally, *avant-garde* means, 'advance guard' which is a military term.



Image-VII *Midnight Children (2014)* By Abhilash Pillai

He also projected 'montage' of images with folk music and songs. The images were showing the dream of the youngsters of newly 'independent India'. Likewise, Sivaraman used video projection in 'Project Nostalgia' he projected several footages on wall, on hand props and on stage props as well. For example, there was a scene in which a character was reading a letter, the video projection was shown on the letter.



Image-VIII *Project Nostalgia (2014)* by Deepan Sivaraman

He created a nostalgic memory of characters in more communicative and interactive ways by using new media. Both the directors challenge the conventional style of theatre experiencing through this artistic use of new media (multimedia and technology) and physical props in the theatre space. A significant aspect of these scenography is to make scenography (static to dynamic) 'performative' from cyclorama to the floor by the use of new media (multimedia and technology). It works with innovative ideas of lighting and sound properties to explore a new experience, affect and aesthetics for theatre and performance arts. This could also become possible because of new engagement of director, scenographer with computer generated units (image, sound, animation, graphics and videos and so on) and technology to control live performance.

2.4. Space, Actor and New media in contemporary theatre practices

Contemporary theatre can be understood as post-dramatic theatre for various reasons. Three aspects become significant in contemporary theatre and performance practices and they challenge the conventional theatre practices. Earlier, the projection of videos and images were used as part of cyclorama, later the projection was used in reference of live performance. Many times director and scenographer also used the project of videos and images to show inner conflicts and emotions of particular characters in performance. Now it is providing a creative and 'performative space'¹² (virtual space) for theatre and performance arts. Many director and scenographers like Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivaraman (here I not claiming that only these directors use these techniques) have been projecting videos and images on the performing body, costumes, and floor to make aesthetic and political statements in theatre. Kapur has been using video projection on performing boy (actor's body) in 'Antigone Project' (2002). She was trying to show inner conflicts and mental situation of women in the time of riot through those projections. She wanted to show that how

¹² In contemporary theatre practices, space itself perform during the show through the use of new media (multimedia and technology).

during every riot women especially go through multilayered oppressions. Pillai has used a similar method in *Midnight's Children* (2014) where he projected montage of images from the independence period. These experiments transform the 'performing body' into 'dual-performative'. In the first case, performing body is performing in nature itself and in the second case, performing body (as an object) become performative through the projected images and videos on body and costumes. For instance, Sivaraman has used videos projection frequently in more articulate ways in *Dr. Caligari* (2015), *Spinal Cord* (2009) and *Project Nostalgia* (2014).



Image-IX *Dr. Caligar* (2015-16) by Deepan Sivaraman

In a scene, *Dr. Caligari* (2015) extends his body part in a gesticulated action, while an actor was typing the action on the type-writer. In *Spinal Cord* (2009) Deepan Sivaraman used video projection to highlight the parts of the body, an operation theatre scene. He used videos projection for the extensions of characters' body. Sometimes to create body double which remain ambiguous. With new media and technology, contemporary theatre directors are trying to intensify the spectator's senses through the montage. Many theatre and performance scholars call these contemporary practices as 'image theatre'. It is true that contemporary theatre practices have been

constituted by intensive use of image (electronic generated image and multi-mediatized image in theatre and performance space). Michel Foucault would call it image's power to organize a society. To understand 'power' of image theatre, Foucault said in an analysis of the image's "internal relations of domination and resistance, as well as their external relations with spectators and with the world." (Mitchell: 1995, P- 445). The power of image can be identified in most of the production of Pillai, Kapur and Deepan. Their usage of new media (multimedia and technology) is an intervention, through which a digital/virtual body is created in contrast to the physical body.

Digital body has the capability to modify, accommodate, annihilate and more so to multiply meaning and effect. It can also undermine the dominant power of text based drama. New media (multimedia and technology) allows instantaneous and visual transfiguration of space, performing body (action, emotion and mood) and therefore becomes more dynamic and performantive. Contemporary theatre practitioners are using these materials also to configure transitions and the stage of in-betweens. In this process, performance becomes fluid and meanings get illustrated. It also create a space of dialogue between actor, scenography (environments) and spectator as well.

The use of new media (multimedia and technology) in the contemporary theatre practices created an imaginative virtual space. It extended/ enlarged actor's body and emotion. It shows the inner conflicts of the characters through image, videos, graphics and animation and so on. It has the capacity to refer a particular scene to a particular context. Most importantly, it blurs the boundary that exists in the disciplinary formation of arts, science, social science and other disciplines. New media can be considered as the best artistic expression, full of theatrical effects that gets appropriated for the nature and style of the production. With this advantageous position new media (multimedia) as method of scenographic design is better placed than 'conventional' theatre design and performance making (meaning making process). Even in terms of creative experimentations and artistic development, new

media can offer better scope than conventional theatre New media expression is more powerful in style and experience for the contemporary spectators. Through the use of new media (multimedia and technology) director and scenographers can create a virtual cosmos. This is also in the line of the technological orientation of our contemporary society.

2.5. Use of Multimedia as a threat to the liveness of performance

Here I would like to reflect on the relationship between body (actor and spectator) and scenography (physical and virtual) through the idea of liveness. The reflection is based on the issues raised by Peggy Phelan and Philip Auslander and others. Philip Auslander disagrees with Peggy Phelan's definition of liveness by creating another notion of presence and mediation. Auslander in his conceptualization doubts 'very strongly that any cultural discourse can actually stand outside the ideologies of capital and reproduction or should be expected to do so' (1999:197). I would like to address the issue of liveness in contemporary Indian theatre and performance. Phelan has argued that

Performance's only life in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representation: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of production, it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. (Phelan, 1993:41)

Performance and media are assuredly different and separate creatures, but I also argue that media can take on performative qualities, and not only because performance goes into the process of its creation. For Phelan, the mechanism of theater's transmission is everything. If a live audience views a performance, it remains a performance, but if it is ingested through a projector and screen (or a

television), it ceases to be a performance. The content of a production is outside of this discussion, though being mediatized would, in Phelan's view, diminish whatever political impact it may have. This diminishing is due to the performance's entry into a mass-market frame. Part of it also has to do with the reciprocal subjectivity involved in the performance, as Diana Taylor notes, "We are all caught off balance in the spectatorial gaze, suddenly aware that the 'object' of our gaze is also a subject who looks back, who challenges and objectifies us" (Taylor: 1998, P- 183). In the proscenium theatre a production happens every evening in front of the spectators, but there is space to accommodate variants. New media (multimedia) is a powerful medium to repeat and reproduce 'live' performance with many other forms of arts, it forces performance to explore a new rational, new approach, experience, expression and performance surroundings. The live performance has developed a new form that possibly would never have arisen if it were not intertwined, with several human activities and hadn't absorbed other genres of arts and science.

In the context of liveness and performance debate, Peggy Phelan claimed that the 'live performance is transgressive, making each performance unique and irreproducible, separating it ontologically from the mediatized (Phelan 1993). Philip Auslander has criticised her for being nostalgic. Auslander makes evident that contemporary theatre and performance is mediatized so much so that theatre and performance repeatedly draw their ideas from new media (multimedia and technology). I see two extreme stances of Phelan and Auslander working as binary. Fischer-Lichte and Dixon rightly argued that both extreme stances can make theatre and performance experience. Dixon elaborates the idea of liveness through 'the works of art' and he finds out that these practices uphold both extreme of artistic capability.

On the one hand it stands as evidence for the unique aura and presence of live performance, which can only be damaged and robbed by technology, and not significantly alter reception of performance, since our minds (and performance itself) are already mediatised. (Dixon, 2007:17)

Phelan defines some aspects of the live theatre and performance in terms of their uniqueness of the digital performance or unique experience by the user of new media (multimedia and technology) in contemporary theatre practices. That can be seen in the productions of Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur, and Deepan Sivaraman. There is space for inconsistency, impulsiveness and contextual appropriateness. New media creates uniqueness by capturing real-time and space in performance. The trajectory of new media lies in its nonverbal language, gestural and postural language. Through the uses of new media (multimedia and technology), the visual language no longer remains the preserve of human-to-human interaction. Using new media (multimedia and technology), the gestural and postural language of the computer-generated atmosphere is not generated in but is a digital reconstruction of a live atmosphere movement. The significance of the production of Pillai, Kapur and Sivaraman lies in incorporating the extremes that both Phelan and Aulander have suggested. Though the primary responsiveness of physical realities is always there, but the newness of the new media rests in its intermediality and interaction. The new media not only helps to create uniqueness of real time and space but also it is capable of capturing the spontaneity and intricacy of the visual language.

There are various possibilities to capture motion in live performances as it is full of transgressive potential. Several scholars such as Garau and others have underlined the significance of suitable responses to creating expressive, communicative and meaningful conversation between real and mediatized theatrical and performance elements.

The challenge with human-human communication is to drive avatar behaviours that enrich, rather than hinder, communication between remote participants. With human-agent communication, the challenge lies in simulating intelligent social responses by coupling the agent's dialogue with appropriate conversational behaviours. (Garau, 2000:105)

This is a clear difference between live and video projection. Though the differences cannot be viewed as contradiction, both can have their individual presence. Awareness and study about the live and mediatized culture in contemporary theatre and performance practices, simplifies an enhanced understanding of experiences reported by spectators in relation to liveness. Thereby permitting a suitably stimulating circumstance for understanding the new spectacle of theatre and performance. These discussion around the ontological and physical uses of liveness for the theatre and performance practices opens up numerous ways for cross-disciplinary discourse of the arts, sciences and other genres as well.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter attempts to explore the use of real-time and ludic space in contemporary theatre and performance practices. It examines the relation between live and mediatized element in the process of performance making.

The use of new media (multimedia and technology) is one of the most affective, performative, expressive and artistic developments in contemporary theatre and performance practice. The directors, designers and scenographers do not use these media for the sake of representing contemporary society, they rather use them to address new challenges that society are facing. New media and technology are able to bring out the issues of innumerable dreams and inner conflicts our society is facing. Sometimes a particular event encounters characters in the contemporary society. New media can be considered as an artistic medium in totality which contributes to the development of the design language, new aesthetics and 'inexperienced' expression. As we know contemporary theatre practices deal with visual and sensorial composition and one can think of a close relation between scenography and dramaturgy. In an interview Deepen Sivaraman has said that he sees contemporary theatre as the practice of visualization. A new trend has emerged in contemporary theatre practices where directors, scenographers are creating a visual

dramaturgy on an 'idea'. To explore this idea, they explore new media (multimedia and technology), performing body (movement), different kinds of materials and alternative space or site specific performance. More or less this has become a trend in contemporary theatre.

Anuradha Kapur now believes in the idea of visual dramaturgy. In THE HINDU LET FOR LIFE¹³ fest 2014, she referred back to Stanislavski who said that 'peoples come to theatre for subtext; they can read the text at home'. In this context of new media, the subtext becomes live through the 'visual' use of new media, material, action, light and sound and so on. Kapur argues that in such theatre practices, action drives the word rather word driving the action. These experiments with theatre practices have changed the whole concept of the design and now it is replaced by the term 'scenography'.

The contemporary mediatized scenography of theatre and performance practices are flexible in nature in comparison to linear and conventional theatre practices. The form is more flexible, expressive and performative. New media in a way has also encouraged and opened up a door for collaborative kinds of work. It is fundamentally because media as a genre itself is collaborative in nature. Like light and materials, new media (multimedia and technology) has radically transformed the space and experience of watching theatre and performance. New media (multimedia and technology) offers a unique quality to instantly transform and sculpt space according to the demands of an 'idea' in a real time and space.

¹³ Lit for Life is an annual literary festival organize by the English daily The Hindu, India. The festival was inaugurated in 2011 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of The Hindu's literary review.

Chapter 3

Collaborative Explorations: Reformulating the New Space of Scenography

3.1. Introduction

This chapter is an attempt to explore collaborative approaches of contemporary theatre practitioners and their use of genres and ‘alternative space’¹ in scenography. In the contemporary theatre practices, ‘space’ has undergone a radical transformation. In many recent productions, directors, scenographers, designers are leaving the ‘proscenium theatre’² and using alternative space or ‘site specific performance’³ like art gallery, park, lawn, building gallery, monuments and collaborative space and so on. For example, Abhilash Pillai created a collaborative theatre and performance space with circus artist in his production ‘*Clown and Cloud*’ (2012). He also collaborated with *Koodiyattam*⁴ performers in *Peer Gynt* (2015). Anuradha Kapur has created alternative space in many of her productions such as in ‘*Virasat*’ (2014), ‘*409 Ramkinkars*’ (2015) and so on. Deepan Sivaraman mostly worked with alternative space as it was in the case *Dr. Caligori* (2015-16), *Ubu Roi* (2012), and the recent production of *The Legend of Khasak* (2015) and so on. This chapter explores scenography in the light of collaborative explorations and changing space. Most of the contemporary directors, scenographer, and designers are doing collaborative work for such productions and their works can be read as collaborative explorations. This collaborative approach of theatre and performance create powerful

¹ I take alternative space as the space not created for theatre. It can be a building, park, storeroom, and gallery and so on.

² The proscenium of a theatre stage is structure in front of the stage that frames the action of the play. It can exist in many forms. Stage curtain is generally directed behind it.

³ ‘Site specific’ marks the practice of performing in sites that are not built for theatre. It means that the location that is discovered for a particular performance is used in intact and unaltered way (see Aronson 1981).

⁴ Koodiyattam is a form of Sanskrit theatre (Indian Classical theatre) traditionally performed in Kerala.

visual language to theatre combining various independent genera of arts like film, music, painting, sculpture, animation and graphics. It often activates tactile senses of actors and spectators as well. This chapter examines how ‘fourth wall’⁵ is breaking and creating more participatory kinds of space. Anuradha Kapur has shared her idea of this alternative and participatory space. She said that ‘during the performance of *Virasat* (2014) spectator was sitting very close to the performance space. There was an old character who was sleeping, suddenly a spectator took hand fan and started fanning him for 30 to 45 minutes’ (Kapur, interview). Deepan had similar experience in his production of *Ubu Roi* (2012) when globe on the stage was burning, spectators were trying to run-out from their seats as the heat was very high and spectators are very close to the performance space. He later told me that he wanted to give spectators a real experience (Sivraman, interview). I would like to see what happens to actor’s body and spectator’s experience in such alternative space? What were the limitations in earlier (proscenium) space that necessitated such demands? This does not mean that alternative space does not have its problems. In this context, I would like to explore politics of gallery space and alternative space. The chapter will elaborate two productions of selected directors.

Here, I would like to introduce the respective productions on which I am going to discuss the problems. I take Abhilash Pillai’s production of *Peer Gynt* (2015), *Clown and Cloud* (2012) and *Lorem Ipsum* (2015), Anuradha Kapur’s *Virasat* (2014), ‘409 Ramkinkars’ (2015) and Deepan Sivaraman’s *Dr. Caligori* (2015), *Ubu Roi* (2012) and *The Legend of Khasak* (2016) for this analysis. These productions were collaborative in nature and mostly performed in the alternative space, at least not in the proscenium stage. In *Peer Gynt* (2015), Pillai collaborated with traditional *Koodiyattam* Performers (actor and ‘*Mizhavu*’⁶ players), modern performer (actor and

⁵ The fourth wall is the imaginary ‘wall’ at the front of the stage in traditional three-walled box set in a proscenium theatre, through which the spectators sees the performance.

⁶ A Mizhav or Mizhavu is a big copper drum played as an accompanying percussion instrument in the *Koodiyattom* and *Koothu*, performing arts of Kerala. The Ambalavasi Nambiar community plays it. After 1965, after the establishment of mizhavu repertory in

western music Guitar player) and video artist. This collaborative production created new space and a new adaptation of Peer Gynt. The production was able to attract the spectators who like classical performances and other who love to watch modern music and performance. This was new as most of directors use and adapt their plays in one genre and style, this intermix was new and innovative. Abhilash Pillai's approach was interdisciplinary in nature where he collaborated with three genres of arts (traditional performance), contemporary style of performances and video artist. The production created a new language of collaborative approach which could be described as semi-classical, semi-modern or a new style and genre of performance altogether. More or less, he used similar approach in *Clowns and Clouds* which was a collaboration work with circus artist.

Pillai's fascination with circus began in childhood continues till now. In *Clowns and Clouds*, he collaborated with the Grand *Circus* of Kerala and National School of Drama students. This was the first time in the history of Bharat Rang Mahotsav (annually organized by National School of Drama), such a collaborative performance could happen. Similar was the case of Anuradha Kapur when she put her performance in the Indra Gandhi National Center for Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi.

The story of *Clowns and Clouds* was based on a Panchtantra story. Using traditional art forms of Kerala along with acrobatics acts of Indian circus, puppet and a Chinese folk tell which narrates the story of origin of theatre. Two and half hours of the play was full of acrobatic movements. Besides, *Clown and Cloud* (2012) innovated space as the performance could not have done in the conventional theatre hall. While the circus artists created space for performance, theatre artists came with the idea of light, effect and video artist projected video.

Lorem Ipsum (2015) was a play in which Abhilash Pillai tried to illustrate the dichotomy of experiences: the pain of sadness and the tears of happiness. The play has different stories running behind flying, disappearance and the anecdote of

kalamandalam mizhavu breaks the caste barrier and nowadays anyone can play mizhavu in koodiyattam, nangiar koothu, chakyar koothu, and mizhavu thayambaka.

humankind's aspirations for flying. (For more detail go to chapter second) Abhilsh Pillai expressed these ideas through the collaborative experiments with theatre artist, video artist, animator, musician and architecture. He attempted to break the notion of proscenium structure by turning the proscenium theatre into airport. He very differently like he created total environments of airport, he covert spectators seating space in the airport 'waiting room' where spectators were waiting to fly and after some advertisement and announcements spectators enter into flight. He divided stage in three parts, two parts for spectators and one part in the middle for performance. We as spectators were experiencing like flying in aeroplane. Projected video was giving an impression of sky and cloud through our flight was passing through.

Virasat (2013-14) directed by Anuradha Kapur (for details see chapter first) was extremely realistic in its nature. Actors were cooking food, washing cloth, stitching old cloths in performance. Instead of representing them, they were doing that action besides acting. This extreme realistic approach forced Kapur to collaborate with scenographer Deepan Sivraman and other musicians and architect to create real environments. She came out of the proscenium theatre because the way she designed *Virasat* was not possible to stage in any proscenium theatre. It was performed in the alternative space created with the collaborative and interdisciplinary approach of theatre practices.

409 Ramkinkars (2015) was an intensive collaborative work of Vivan Sundram, Anuradha Kapur, Santanu Bose, Rimili Bhattacharya and Aditi Biswas. The director selected a site-specific space in Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts (IGNCA) (for more details see chapter first). The alternative space became performative itself with the presence of sculptures and artifacts. It had performance structures in which actors and spectators could have free movement. The space was creating an impression of mela (fairground) and spectators were getting immersed. The *409 Ramkinkar (2015)* was an attempt to create a replica of past as it happened. The performance was able to bring the dynamics of space which was full of ideas, materials pedagogy and life. Material, text and body were attempting to produce a

sense of Ramkinkars Baij's art practice which ranged across sculpture, painting, scenography and theatre.

Dr. Caligori (2015) by Deepan Sivaraman took a long process, started five months before the first performance as part of classroom scenography, space spectators and performer. The dramaturgy and scenography evolved simultaneously working in this particular site, which was a rundown warehouse, now converted into a performing space. In this performance, Sivaraman attempted to explore the possibility of total theatre in which all the aspects of theatre such as scenography, dramaturgy, actor's performance come together to make it a 'total' experience. (For details, see the chapter second)

Ubu Roi (2012) was an adaptation of a classic French work by Alfred Jarry with direction, scenography and dramaturgy by Deepan Sivaraman (for more details see chapter first). The production was the experimental in its nature, where spectators came to be part of performance. He designed huge space in which policemen roam on the motorbike around the spectators. He created a full impression of concentration camp. When spectators enter into performance arena they could see the door locked. They could not go out during the performance. Spectators felt as they are trapped in concentration camp. Regarding this experiment, Sivaraman had said to *The Indian Express*, 'I don't want people to only understand a play, I want them to experience it in a way that the message goes right into them' (Indian Express, May 8, 2012).⁷ Sivaraman create several symbols, for example he used human skeleton which was symbolizing the rebellion poets, painter, journalist or activists who spoke against speaks against the kingdom or in favors of people.

The Legend of Khasak (2015) was an adaptation of the well-known Malayalam novel *The Legends of Khasak (Khasakkinte Ithihasam)* written by O.V. Vijayan. The play is about modern mythology. The play reconstructed the imagined

⁷ Nath, Dipanita. *National Award, inshallah footall, Ashin Kumar, film on social causeskeletons in the kngs cupboard.* May 8, 2012. <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/national-award-inshallah-footall-ashin-kumar-film-on-social-causeskeletons-in-the-kngs-cupboard> (accessed july 10, 2016)

rural residence of the legendary land Khasak in the background of north Malabar region of Kerala. The used myths were still part of living traditions in the region. Again the production was done in an alternate site-specific space. Sivraman created a huge rectangular pit of loose ground because of extensive uses of five elements (fire, soil, water, air (scent), and sky) and there has huge number of symbol moving which some time appearing and despairing through extensive uses of huge mask, puppets, and video projection. Specters were sitting/ standing close to the performance space, where they were able to participate and experience the pleasures and tragedy of environment. It seems that the extensive scenographic experiments were able to activate the collective memory of people about the Legend of Khask. The story was recreated by creating the scenographic atmosphere in a ritualistic and philosophical plane to tell their tales of celebration of life, earth and myths. For this purpose, he collaborated with many art groups and arts group and folk artists and ritual performance from North Kerala.

3.2. Alternative Space in Contemporary Theatre

‘The terms space and place have long histories and bear with them a multiplicity of meanings and connotations which reverberate with other debates and many aspects of life’ - (Massey: 1994, P-1)

Since the last decade, alternative theatrical space becomes gradually more popular in Indian theatre and performance practices. If we look back to last ten years of professional theatre practice, we realize that many productions were performed in the alternative space. This can be also viewed as decolonization of theatre culture in which practitioners were attempting to reject the colonial and conventional proscenium model of modern theatre because of several reasons. Proscenium theatre also had several limitations. Practitioners had to control their imagination and creativity in a restrictive architecture and space. Performances like Deepan Sivaraman’s ‘*Ubu Roi*’ (2012), Abhilash Pillai’s ‘*Clown and Cloud*’ (2012) and

Anuradha Kapur's work '*Virasat*' (2013-14) and '*Ramkinkars*' (2015) could not be performed in the proscenium theatre without curbing and limiting scenographic possibility. Such works could have become possible because of alternative space. This does not mean that proscenium theatre is all about limitations. The form has several benefits also, for example, directors, scenographers do not have to arrange light, sound, projectors and various other units of performance for the spectators. They are taken for granted in most of the proscenium stages. In this sense, alternative space becomes very challenging. Theatre directors, scenographer and producers have to think about every units of performance, from ideas to transportation convenience of spectators. Despite problems, contemporary theatre directors and scenographers are coming out of the proscenium stage to follow their innovative 'ideas' and scenographic strategies. For this purpose, they have been using alternative location, real location, found spaces, created space and collaborative space to express their artistic innovation. They do not need to think in terms of the limited structure of the proscenium without suppressing his/her creative ideas and thinking.

The main focus of any theatrical space is actor and performer. In general practices designer and spectators collaborate together for a chosen space during performance. The common concern of the selection of space had to do with a complex collaborative relationship with space, body and scenographic elements. This collaborative relationship opens up doors for experimentation with alternative space. This is also to address the anxiety to see what takes place when performance happens in a real space. As we know theatre and performance have its own language and reality including real space. It mainly happens in public space, and creating the theatre space, designing theatrical, and performance environments are the most significant factors in the theatrical and performance experience for performer and spectators together. In the theatre and performance arts, the reality of the theatrical space effected by the idea, which performer there, and it (idea) transforms the reality of the space during the performance, but in the proscenium theatre these transformations are unexceptional. On the other hand, rather, these are the space where our society has

established separately where the magic could be shaped without any risk of interruption to other community place and the activities they house. If we look into the history of theatre and performance the concept of the public playhouse had emerged in the last sixteenth and early seventeenth century. We can observe that it as a development of institutionalization of the theatre and performance arts, for regulating the hypothetically destabilizing effects that may happen if idea is allowed to soil the real. In the last decades many theatre and performance productions have opted out of the proscenium theatre and performed in alternative space. Such alternative space includes site specific, public space and in other formats such as in Street theatre, Third theatre and environmental theatre. Performances were also organized in traditional folk performances and contemporary experimental theatre as well). In these experiments, practitioners are exploring space out of the proscenium. Some the practitioners have predominantly struck by way in which such performance influences memoirs, space to tell a story related to particular space (some time activate particular memory of the spectators, who have it personal experience with the site, space). Which allowing the past to recall in the present; and through the much-more motivating methods in which space influence on performance of the creative agency of the spectators. Who transport his/her knowledge and memory of that particular space to the performance; therefore allow running free a dynamic and unpredictable meaning making process. This is the significant dynamic process that, we would like put to emphasis on, for the reason that it gives the impression of something very important going on in relation to the spectator in the move by practitioners to work outside designated theatrical and performance space.

“Space is the main object of creation. It is charged with energy...it shrinks and expands. Space is also an agent in creation of multiple realities” (McKinney & Butterworth, 2009:124 quoting Kantor). Through these debates and practices they have challenged the “fourth wall” (Lehmann, 2006:12) of the conventional theatrical space which creates imaginary borderline in the middle of spectator and performer, and the engagement of the spectators in the formations of “multiple realities”

(McKinney & Butterworth, 2009:124). The same spectators give the impression at times to continue passive, not quite part of the performance. However even an apparently passive spectator might experience a reflective resonance in the performance. Contemporary practitioner trying to take spectators very close to the performance (I have already given examples from Kapur's and Sivaraman's production). They are attempting to create a democratic (I have discussed in chapter one) and collaborative space with director, writer, designer and scenographer, painter, sculptures, filmmaker, animator, sound artist, actor and spectators as well. In this regard Lehmann suggests that: "Theatre means collaborative spent and used up lifetime in the collaboratively breathed air of the space in which the performing and spectating take place" (Lehmann: 2006, P- 17). Similarly, Abhilash Pillai wrote in his Ph.D. thesis (*The Space Through Visual Language in Indian Theatre*) "the group 'Oxygen' is a new experimental theatre company based in Trissur, Kerala. It aims to develop theatre production in collaboration with various visual artists from the discipline of theatre, painting, sculpture, installation, and video arts and so on. Oxygen research and explore the possibilities of a contemporary modern visual language in Indian theatre". (Pillai: 2012, P - 224-225) The provided space for spectator is not detached space from the performance space. In some of the conventional theatre practices many practitioners might have been detached spectators from the performance space. This is unfortunate that our maximum proscenium arch had this detachment through architectural construction, there is minimum distance between 'performing and spectating' (in the Lehmann words) is one and half (1/2) meter or more than that. There is minimum communication between performer and spectators because performers are not able to see the spectator's reactions, not able to touch each-others; in this regard Deepan Sivaraman has said that in a seminar in 'Ibsen Festival'⁸ Delhi 2011.

⁸ The International Ibsen Festival opens in the autumn season at The National Theatre of Norway every other year. The festival celebrates the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen through Norwegian and international performances of high artistic quality. Most of the performances are held at Ibsen's own theatre and the world's foremost Ibsen laboratory.

‘I am interested in developing a form that challenges the predominance of proscenium based theatre in India. This to me is very important. The use of proscenium begin with colonial settlement in India but that did not prevent us from adopting it wholesale. The result is that, even after Independence, the proscenium predominance as a theatre space. Many theatre schools even have syllabus on proscenium acting. There have, of course, been plays that were done in other space these were experiments and proved to be the exception rather than the rule. Even people like Kavalam Narayana Panicker and Ratan Thiyam who stand for a ‘theatre of roots’ have really not been able to make us move away from the proscenium. Therefore, my research is also, about how we can replace the proscenium with more flexible space⁹.

Breaking hierarchy of the proscenium theatre is not a new thing, many contemporary practitioners have attempted similar experiments in several parts of the world and in India as well. Here I would like to draw an example from the pioneer Indian theatre director Ebrahim Alkazi who did some milestone production using proscenium theatre. In Mohan Rakesh’s *‘Ashadh Ka Ek Din’*, he broke s the notion of ‘box set¹⁰’ and introduced a creative form of set. He also created an alternative space, which was giving an impression of real location. After that, he did many productions in alternative space, found space and site specific performance. Alkazi did some of the best productions of site specific performance in the post-colonial Indian theatre history. He did *Sutan Razia 1972*, *Tughlaq (1973)*, and *Andha Yug (1974)* in Purana Qila (Old Fort). His sense of space and utilizing the site for performance was unraveling and it shows some of the rare achievements in context of scenography.

⁹ Pillai, Abhilash. *The Space Through Visual Language in Indian Theatre* . Ph.D Thesis , New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2012, P-228-229.

¹⁰ This is often used in the production of naturalistic plays. It describes a set, which is a ‘realistic’ room with three walls and it is as through the fourth wall has been removed so that audience members feel as though they are observing real action.

Alternative space/found space/site specific performances can be used as an experimental space for performance. Theatre as a representational form of art includes different genres of arts, science (intermedial approach of performance making) to make meaningful statements on theatrical and performance space. The alternative space has both aspects, sometimes space works well with idea and can create an amazing experience, but sometimes it can go entirely in wrong direction. Sometimes alternative architectures really help in creating performance, sometimes it can create more difficulties (obstruction for performer and spectators as well) and for directors and designer to control the whole performance. When we perform in the conventional theatre structure which usually has constructed for performance relatively landscape works as foster the creation of real, different, limitless visual effect on stage. Alternative space cannot be 'empty space', it always come with historical background, memory of the performers and spectators.

This chapter emphasizes that the 'performativity of space' and the creative construction of the space identities comes through conversational engagements with specific location. According to Judith Butler, "performativity as 'discursive or embodied act produces material effects' (Butler: 1993, P- 9-10). The performativity of space leads to understanding the meaning of the space, which keeps changing over time.

Site-specific performance are conceived for, mounted within and conditioned by the particulars of found space, existing social situations or locations, both used and disused... they are inseparable from their sites, the only contexts within which they are intelligible. Performance re-contextualizes such sites: it is the latest occupation of a location at which other occupations their material traces and histories are still apparent: site is not just an interesting, and disinterested, backdrop. (Pearson and Shanks: 2001, 23)

How conversational imaginaries develops into materiality, and how production like *The Legend of Khasak (2015)*, *Clown and Cloud (2012)* is performed in the public space to produce actual, reality, positive effect for locality (space) and communities is something to be noted. This argument of place –identity is prominent, culturally located and partial, according to Donna Haraway’s concept to be found knowledge, contemporary model of knowledge fabrication, which challenges the totalizing perspective of ‘objective’ scientific knowledge (183-201). The method of meaning making, coalescing performativity and situated knowledge about the particular space or site has profoundly political consequence as well. The material and embodied characteristic of the performativity of space proposes some small modifications in discourse and social practices, performed from long time by innumerable people, could expressively transform the material circumstances. These viewpoints maybe very close to the conception of intention in the alternative or site specific performance. Form the definition of theatre and performance art, it need a certain styles of performantive environments, which has a range of symbol, codes and conventions. Sometimes in theatrical and performance, materials are kept in performance space without any logical and conceptual relationship between material and environments. There is a new kind of relationship emerging between idea and forms of space, a significant element in the site-specific performance, Eileen Dillon have observed that, ‘movement that is borne out of a sensory response to environment draws an audience’s attention as much to the environment as to the performer’ (Dillon, 1988, in Wrights and Site, 2000).

According to above concept, main objective of performance to reveal the site, for instance in 409 *Ramkinkar (2015)*, there was a part inside the gallery, where two actresses were performing on a ‘vertical structure’ (it was like a pillar). Other part was outside of gallery. There was a huge structure, where performer was driving through that structure. This movement was the consequence from the direct response to the space, structure, atmosphere of the performance area. According to Victoria Hunter words, “the site in a sense had begun to choreograph to choreographer, calling

for a particular movement approach and drawing my aesthetics attention toward particular architectural and spatial feature which could not be ignored” (Hunter : 2005, P- 374).

3.3. Collaborative Approach of Contemporary Scenography

In its collaborative approach, contemporary Indian theatre is engaging with dance, music, theatre, painting, video arts, and sculpture and so on. Pillai, Kapur, Sivaraman are creating a collaborative circle, an intermedial and interdisciplinary collaboration of the artists who wished to explore the art in more expressive way or they would like to blur the boundary of the arts, social science, humanities and science. The collaborative works depend on a group of artist, scientists, technicians who work together with their expertise through a long of channel of communication and collaboration, negotiate with a common ‘idea’, which explore the meaning making process in the theatrical and performance space. The collaborative working style of artists and their shared vision might be explored as a new way of presentation, communication or it could be a new theoretical paradigm for contemporary Indian theatre and performance art. Each artists has significant contribution in the exploration of the ‘idea’, each has gone through a creative process of theatre and performance making over time. C. S. Lewis has describes the group vision and the contribution of the each participant in group is significant for the ‘idea’, ‘even when... Friends are far away¹¹,’ for the collaborative unit, each artists work is an expression, manifestation of the productions collective vision constructed through his or her own creative and artistic thoughts.

Scenography is the term that denote to the construction of a fictive environment where text, ideas are explored by the actors, directors and designers and scenographers. Scenography itself is one of the best mediums of artistic expressions.

¹¹ Collaborative Arts: Conversations on Collaborative Arts Practice, under “Essays: Collaborative Circles and Creative Work by Michael P. Farrel”, <http://collabarts.org> (accessed April 5, 2016)

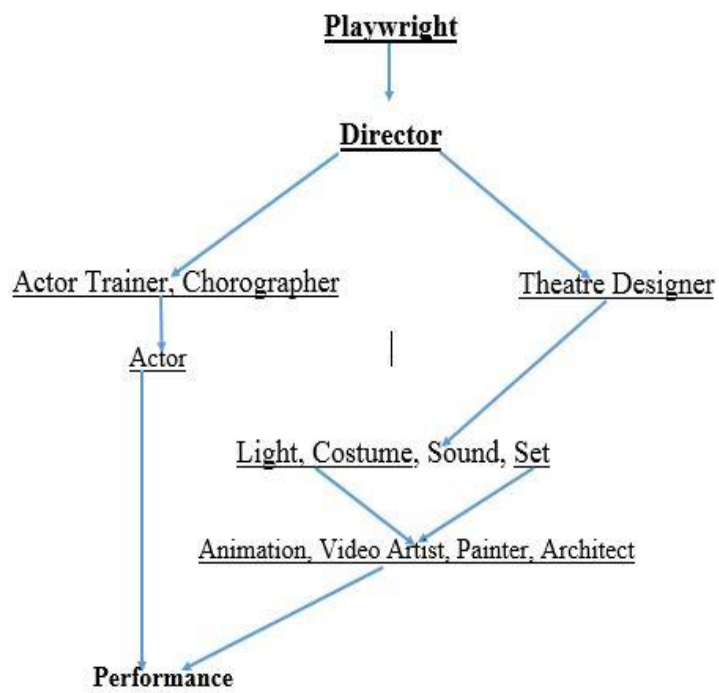
As Christopher Baugh described it, ‘scenography’ many of us are using this term very frequently instead of stage design and theatre design, to explain as “the artists who have responsibility for all visual and aural contributions of theatre and performance: the stage setting and properties, costume design, light and sound” (Baugh, 2005: 131). Pamela Howard defines “scenography is the seamless synthesis of space, text, research, art, actors, directors and spectators that contributes to an original creations” (Howard: 2002, P- 130), and Joslinn McKinney and Philip Butterworth elaborate upon this to suggest that “scenography is not simply concerned with creating and presenting image to an audience; it is concerned with audience reception and engagement. It is sensory as well as an intellectual experience, emotional as well as rational” (2009:04). Not just back drop of the theatrical action or decoration of the performance space, it is a significant art that explore the entire theatrical and performance works, it is most significant “physical vocabulary of the stage” (Aronson, 2005:07). This creative and communicative process of meaning making is able to explore the vision, concept, idea of playwright, director, scenographer and actors as well. We have observed a significant change in contemporary Indian theatre and performance; practitioners are working with ‘essence of drama’ (script/text). they are not taking whole drama as it is, or they works with ‘independent ideas’ this contemporary practices had develop a new trend of ‘visual dramaturgy’, which have developed a collaborative theatre practices. Contemporary theatre practitioners like Pillai, Kapur and Sivaraman’s production depend on huge collaboration, with different forms of arts and since practitioners. Pillai collaborate with Koodiyattam performer and musician in *Peer Gynt* (2015), circus artist in *Clown and Cloud* (2012), Kapur collaborate with painter, filmmaker, sculptor and folk artist in *Virasat* (2004), *409 Ramkinkars* and Sivaraman in *Ubu Roi* (2012), *Dr. Caligori* (2015) and *The Legend of Khasak* (2016). Baugh place an example of collaborative theatre from the works of Stanislavski and Bertolt Brecht, “the director Stanislavski, who worked with Chekhov at ‘Moscow Art Theatre’¹², collaborates closely with the

¹² Moscow Art Theatre, in full Moscow Art Academic Theatre, Russian Moscovsky

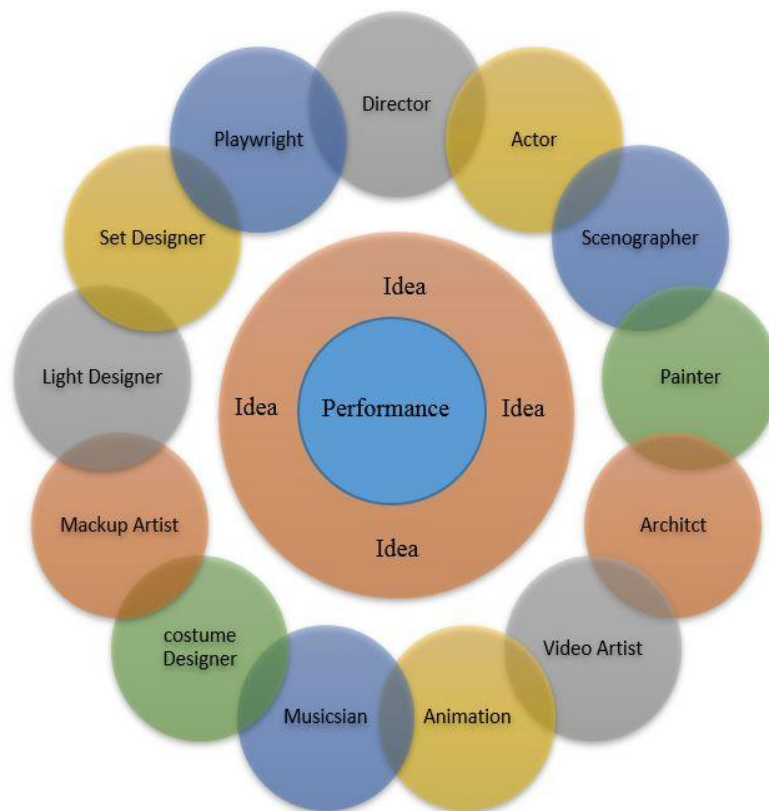
designer Viktor Simov, and Bertolt Brecht worked with scenographer Caspar Neher” (Baugh, 2005: 84). Similarly Kapur said in an Interview that ‘contemporary theatre practices have developed a creative dramaturgy, detailed scenographic approach, where each and every materials, color, line image, graphics, sound, action matter’, this visual, audible, smells are signifies and resonate the performance.

In the collaborative approach of contemporary theatre many artists from different genres come to be an integral part of the production and meaning making process. One can argue that what is new in this? I argue that while in the previous theatre practices, other genres of artist work under the circumstance of director, or in the other word they worked as manual laborers. Of course, a director cannot be an expert of everything. Director may have knowledge of painting, animation, videography but he does not know how to paint, in that case collaboration becomes a necessity.

Akademichesky Khudozhestvenny Teatr, or Moscovsky Khudozhestvenny Teatr, outstanding Russian theatre of theatrical naturalism founded in 1898 by two teachers of dramatic art, Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. Its purpose was to establish a theatre of new art forms, with a fresh approach to its function. Sharing similar theatrical experience and interests, the cofounders met and it was agreed that Stanislavsky was to have absolute control over stage direction while Nemirovich-Danchenko was assigned the literary and administrative duties. The original ensemble was made up of amateur actors from the Society of Art and Literature and from the dramatic classes of the Moscow Philharmonic Society, where Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko had taught. Influenced by the German Meiningen Company, Stanislavsky began to develop a system of training for actors that would enable them to perform realistically in any sort of role and situation.



Previous Theatre and Performance Structure



Collaborative form of contemporary theatre practices

Nowadays every artist has freedom to explore 'Idea', 'text' (drama) express it through his/her own respective discipline (at one idea, writer explore it with words, painter explore it with color, line, texture and so on, musician explore it with instruments and sound, film make explore it with camera, each and every artist express differently to a common idea). Collaborative form of theatre can contribute to a composite dialogue with spectators. It provides a complete sense of the texture of the scenography as well as its visual composition. They collaborate with their own expressive art works to make theatre and performances multilayered artistic expression with affective spectacles. Every art work has a multi-layered relationship with theatre and performance as an actor, an art works discarded, rejected and modified conceptually and practically up to the works had materialized in the production. In Kapur and Sivaraman's case, in *Virasat* (2013) and *409 Ramkinkars* (2015) some of the scenographic works, body movement and compositions are extremely detailed, real and reveal a profound engagement in the production.



Image-I *Virasat* (2013) directed by Anuradha Kapur, Scenography by Deepan Sivaraman



Image-II *The Legend of Khasak (2015)* by Deepan Sivaraman

I think that contemporary theatre practitioners open up dialogues with other genres of artist to make theatrical experience more profound, expressive and communicative. A scenographic perspective of theatre making not only emphasizes actor's performance in live impact in the contemporary theatre but it focus on the details work of '*performantive environment*' which depends on collaboration with other genre's artists. The collaborative theatre practices opens up a canvas for collaborators and give them freedom to creatively engage with their own artistic tools like storytelling, painting, video art, multimedia and technology. This collaborative approach is essential for the production from an intermedial or interdisciplinary perception in direction to raise the value of the multi-layered nature of production itself. Production like *Virasat (2013)*, *The Legends of Khasak*, *Clown, and Cloud (2012)* have explored the space and place in the different manners. Their internal its confrontation is one of the essential communications which illustrate subjectivity and the social: the affiliation within subjects and objects, the self and surroundings. The approach brings social, cultural, political, economical, and psychological and so on

together for their wider manifestations. Contemporary theatre and performance practices engage with these essential classifications.

3.4. Impact of the Alternative space on Actor and Spectators

Henri Lefebvre said that the conventional theatre space is the 'dominated' and 'appropriated' space. He takes an example from the proscenium theatre, the conventional space was occupied by technology and controlled by the institutions of political and economic power, despite the fact that 'appropriated' space is usual space, improved to work for the requirements and potentials of a specific group in the society. His assertion ideally subjugated and misappropriated the space that should be existent in a well-adjusted association with each other, according to the above analysis. But in contemporary Indian social and political context, most of the space has been excessively dominated by military, the state and political power, for instance if we look to the condition of Kashmir, Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal, Bengal, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh and so on. For instance Cohen Cruz has wrote in his book '*Radical street performance*' regarding space control and domination, he said

Space is always controlled by someone and exists somewhere, so is inevitably marked by a particular class or race and not equally accessible to everyone... While the mobility of much street performance facilitates the seeking out of diverse audience, one must question if access to a broader audience really is a difference between performance in the street and in theatre buildings (Cohen Cruz: 1998, p-2)

The state and power similarly attempts to control sexuality and body. The supremacy of overpowering force and other dominating technique, like new media and communication technology, which focusses on extreme prominence to the visualization, the body fragments, step down from accountability for the aforementioned in a term, dis-appropriates itself. It is tremendously fascinating and, in

specific, must over and over again take back to know, what is more or less a spontaneous stroke in this debate:

Any revolutionary 'project' today, whether utopian or realistic, must, if it is to avoid hopeless banality, make the re-appropriation of the body, in association with the re-appropriation of space, into a nonnegotiable part of its agenda.

(Lefebvre: 1991, p-167)

It was decades ago when he wrote this, but I think it is more suitable for the contemporary scenario of the state and power domination on space and land through the power and omnipresent reach of digital media. The performance in the alternative space is the revolution against these dominators, the contemporary theatre and performance practices rejects the conventional theatrical and performance space and practitioners moving out-off it. This rejection of conventional space and exploration of alternative space has been creating a new potential for theatre, performance and scenography. It also has been attempting to develop a democratic relationship with theatre and performance itself, with every single element from idea to spectators (including space, actor, director, scenographer, painter, musician, and filmmaker and on). In this kind of democratic performances, 'spectators gain a new kind of creative agency, and where the place itself acquires a voice'¹³, Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivraman echo this in similar tone, "I try to activate each and every 'sense' of the spectator through the environments of the play. We would like to include each and every material, which sensitized the spectators and actor who are entirely immersed in the production" (Kapur and Sivraman, Interview). According to the statements, emerging experiment, theatre and performance in the alternative space is a prominent step the groundbreaking and democratic 'project' of re-appropriating of the body; it is the move toward the nature and spectators' space. Where they feel free to watch the performances and immerse in it, because the performance space is not dominated by

¹³ Mcauley, Gay. "Site-specific Performance: Place, Memory and Creative Agency of the Spectator." *The Journal of the Sydney University Arts Association*, 2005: 30.

any political institutional power. For instance, in the recent performance *The Legend of Khasak*, Sivaraman used school compound which was an ordinary space.

In most of the 'site-specific or site-based' performance, site is not just a backdrop of the performance or stands to fulfill the requirements of the text, or idea as proscenium theatre in the conventional theatre practices but site becomes one of the dominated signifier in a performance. I think The site-based, site-specific or alternative-space performances engages more with the social and political questions than old conventional theatre and performance practices.



Image-III 409 Ramkinkars (2015) by Anuradha Kapur in collaboration with Vivan Sundram

In 409 Ramkinkar, there is a scene where Ramakinkar (character) was creating a sculpture (Mati Ghar, IGNCA) and performers were roaming around, this particular act and site performance took spectators to the social, economical and cultural structure of Ramkinkar's time period.

I would like to disagree with Peter Brook's (*The Empty Space*) idea of empty space: how space can be empty? Every space in the society have it social, political, cultural or historical value or 'perception', every space has its own value. When performers, actor or spectators enter into that particular site-specific space or

alternative space, the space, activates memory in context of the site, sometime site itself become a storyteller and start to perform as a performer, sometimes space gets performed in the visualization of actors, performers and spectators. The perception comes with caste, class, gender and hierarchy, identity and power politics; for instance, if we see the boundary wall of the any fort, you will realize how kings feared the change of political power by the other kingdoms or some time by the people. It is now evident from these examples that the thoughtful encasement with place demanded by site-based performance practices is expected to take in engagement by means of substantial matter which are themselves at the soul of most important political struggles in many parts of the India. Director, actor, performer, spectator and space all of them perform according to perception and baggage of the space. This is one of the biggest challenges of site –specific performance practices for the director, scenographer, actor and spectator as well.

3.5. Politics of Alternative space and Collaborative Approach

The scenography of contemporary Indian theatre modulates and serves as an excellent example of environmental scenography that target to involve audience into performance by uniting them with the respective spaces. Furthermore, such examples can change the perception of alternative space memory among the audience space. The alternative space, site-specific productions till some extent accomplish the principles of environmental scenography without much physical effort, as the audiences share the same environment, same horizon, and walk on the same ground in the same rain, wind and sunshine feeling the same things as that of the actor. Environmental scenography in a way is the practice of demolishing the space between the audience and the performers by placing the audience in the same surrounding as that of the performers or using multiple frames (Aronson: 1981, p-1–5). Casey's (1987) argument clearly states that the recollection and storage of memories work on a similar frame based on principle by correlating it more with the surrounding of the spectators The seating arrangement of the *Virasat (2013)*, *The Legends of Khasak*

(2015), *Clown and Cloud* (2012) and *Lorem Ipsum* (2015) assemi-circular, and the position of gates on both sides encircles it into a full circular framework exemplifies the above concerns



Image-IV *Clown and Cloud* (2012) by Abhilash Pillai at BRM (Bharat Rang Mahotsava)



Image-V The Legend of Khasak (2015) by Deepan Sivaraman

The growing platforms for the audience is limited by a barrier that go along with limiting the view to the well-known farm buildings, expresses the limiting border between performance space and the “outsider”. Hence, the audience is one of the important parts to the scenography. Strong and a clear indication of the border (or the outline of frame) helps the audience to focus on the layers of space used in the performance.

The spectator at the same moment being fully aware of being located in different distinct places can acknowledge being in the same landscape as they watch the events unfold. This makes audience and performers share the similar space or landscape creating smaller separate frames. As observed by Aronson (1981) who states that one of the contributing factors to the existence of separate frames is a frontal seating arrangement. It nurtures perception of the alternative space or site-specific space as the larger covering part of the frame giving limited access to the smaller place. Kalevipoeg discusses one of the problems with the use of alternative space, site-specific space or landscape related memory, which could be deep-rooted in the frontal relationship between spectators and performers. Textual references give proof to the presence of local tradition, but the scenographic solution did not support

the audience's direct engagement with it. Study by Berleant (1991:6) proposes that in such cases, with time the space between the audience and the performer ceases to act as a unifier and creates distance between the place of the perceiver and the object. Even though both the makings used fixed seating arrangements and provided a single slit access to the alternative space that strongly differ from that of the performers and emphasizes the problems of integration; multisensory engagement with the landscape. The problem of fixed seating arrangement can be compensated by the factor that the audience have allowed moving around in the theatrical and performance space during long intermissions. Conversely, it also inspires multisensory connection with the selected performance space outside the functionality of the performance. Furthermore, it also focuses on the possible conflict between the real and fictional landscape and the use of landscape-related memory. In opposite way Landscape and memory are in supportive relationship; landscape allows the connection of memories to landscape elements and promotes its recollection.

In a study by Casey (1987), the author describes the recollected space (alternative, site-specific, landscape) as a scene, which demands active engagement, whereas space is used to detach and attach memories into scenes. Theatre offers varied and productive means to engage with landscape and site-specific space related to memory. Theatre art is the medium to express, initiate, share or modify space related memory. The alternative space performances in contemporary Indian theatre show two primary ways of engaging with landscape and site-specific memory. First, by performing at the same site as chosen in the play based on the event depicts and promises a return in time and second the choice of location and scenographic composition is influenced by the accessibility of space from the time in question. In general, the contemporary Indian theatre practices use places whose history can be sketched back to earlier times. On the other hand, a performance can be created for a particular site, landscape or performance, for instance Deepan Sivaraman's *The Cabinet of Dr. Calligory* (2014-15), and Anuradha Kapur's *Ramkinkar's* (2015), wherein the present state of the alternative space has been exposed as the outcome of the

fictional events that are revealed in the performance. In scenography, the actual landscape is recognized taken as a theatrical and performance environment ready for acting, whereas the compositional relationship shared by the spectators and space add up to the opinion of the original site as well as the landscape used in the performance. Environmental scenography takes up into consideration and use the frame-based structure of landscape observed by Casey (1987). Equivalent to a conventional theatrical and performance space, the alternative space is a framed space acting as a medium that is capable of strong memories and opening them for recollection.

3.6. Conclusion

Contemporary Indian theatre in ‘postdramatic turn’ is characterized by visual and sensual language. With a technological turn, spectators’ eyes and mind are become more apt to observe moving images through the constant bombarding of multimedia, visual effects and fastest T.V screen. Imagination is becoming more and more wide-ranging and our daily routine is becoming faster. Our contemporary society is fighting and negotiating with this bombarding of images. In the present day, people do not have time to talk face to face. They talk on social sites with computer-generated emoticons. With incorporation of speed, multilayered idea, new media, multimedia and technology, hyper-reality our contemporary theatre becomes much more experimental. These experiments need intermedial and collaborative form of theatre and performance practices. In this regard Catriona Scotts’ has said that “often by having people come together in creative work can cause some kind of reaction as each arts form crosses a boundary, moving not into another one but finding a new place or common space together” (2004:2). This explorative new theatrical and performance spaces is the consequence of the collaborative exploration, interdisciplinary and intermedial practices of contemporary theatre. He further argued that, “existing and potential relationship and partnership between disciplines, engage with those spaces between fields of practice and discourse, and help clarify the boundaries of an individual’s own developing practice” (Scott: 2004: 2). This idea of theatre and performance making blur the boundaries between different genres of arts

like theatre, painting, film, sculpture, and animation music and dance and so on. In result, a new collaborative form of theatre and performance has emerged. The form in which individual identity disappears and a shared identity has emerges. The shared identity is more communicative and expressive in nature.

This collaborative process makes contemporary theatre more experimental, where a constant and uninterrupted relationship between enactment and embodiment is going on. These practices have tremendous sense of community (group) in forms of shared expression, shared communication, shared sense of performance making.

Conclusion

Scenography is one of the most significant parts of the theatre, if not the most important part. It is not a new concept and comes from Greek theatre continuing till now. This scenographical practice of theatre however has made significant changes in relation and communication between scenography, actor and spectator through experiment with different materials, light, makeup, costume and multimedia and technology. This study has explored the meaning and function of scenography in the productions of Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivaraman, with stress on scenographic illustration of how contemporary Indian theatre is going through a massive experiment. In the analyses the contemporary social and political as (caste, gender, power, hierarchy and so on) have been seen to emerge through creative and performative symbols.

In the last five to ten years Indian theatre practices have been significantly altered. The contemporary practitioners have been rejecting the conventional theatrical and performance style, space and scenography. There has been a paradigm shift in contemporary theatre and society as well because of the innovative development of new media (multimedia and technology). We are the generation who have observed a shift from letter to 3D touch smart phone, from carbon-copy to 3D printer, from Kabadi to Video Game, from community approach to individualistic approach. These significant changes have produced new perspective on society, politics, culture, science and arts, not only this, they have changed our ways of emotion, expression, language and communication. This should be obvious that if changes are happening in society, then it has to be incorporated in the theatre and performing arts because theatre and performance is not a utopian arts, it's known as the reflection of society.

Scenography is an integral part of a theatrical production like actors, script, and music. Scenography is more like an art work as engraving or sketching. The characteristic of surface, pattern, composition, light, music, materials and various shades impact spectators' aesthetic sense. The symmetrical arrangement of

scenographic elements enhance the quality of visual experience of the spectator. In general visual imagery is associated with pragmatic observations like something to be examined as expression which comes up with particular actions. However I have found out in my research that the scenographic visuals are allied with study of structures of consciousness through the experience of the spectator. Bert States (1985:24) has explained the theory of image and signs by comparing the former with 'disease' and 'sign' with the cause. My research shows that the concept of visual imagery is wider than the imagination of the spectator after connecting with the visuals on the stage. Another aspect of scenography which I noticed during my research is the influence of 'time'. The audience experiences a shift of focus as there is a disruption of thoughts. There is always a consistent progress of scenographic images during a performance.

I found out in my analysis that there exist a communication of scenographic resources with the performers. It has been noticed that in a theatrical performance, many times the performers become one with the scenographic descriptions. Scenography makes a huge impact on the physical movement of an actor in a performance, the particular kind of attire an actor wears, locale of the stage, light which helps the actor to position himself/herself in the right framework required by the performance. I further realized that earlier the scenographic elements (such as alternative space, light, sound, materials and multimedia and so on) were not given much importance in Indian conventional theatre but gradually in contemporary theatre and performance it has prominently marked their presence. It is more powerful, so it becomes significantly a creative, expressive and communicative medium between director, scenographer, actor, scenographic elements and spectator in a short of democratic manner.

Scenographic image especially where spectators can understand the role of decoding productions can also create cognitive sense. However, as per my experience and understanding in the scenographic field, the most respondents have indicated the polysemous and complex nature of symbolic visual communication. There is huge possibilities that the scenographic materials may convey some meaning autonomously through performers, although it has been seen time to time that scenographic images

incorporate the performers. On such occasions, Barthes' 'obtuse' meaning which needed a poetical rather than intellectual assimilation, might take hold, leaving behind the unsettled or debatable but productive tension for the spectators (1977:61). It has been seen that very frequently the characteristics of the composition trigger new points of reference, very often related to spectators' subjective feelings and their own personal experiences from the past. Additionally, there is a possibility that scenographical multi-sensory characteristics may lead to a phenomenological encounter that sparkles the embodied understandings of the physical and material world. Such sensations are frequently recorded through intuition and impressions rather than in fully formed images.

Shift in attention and lapse into distraction establish an important part in meaning-making process. Scenography can manipulate the spectators or viewers' attention without any complications. On the other hand, spectators have a lot of possibility to explore or decode the visual language within the scenographic frame of the particular production; they have freedom to choose where to focus and where to ignore, what to accept and what to reject. Disruption and surprise in the scenographic formation helps to initiate the critical distance. Distraction, due to the result of prolonged attention, may lead to productive inattentiveness or lack of concentration where spectators are open to association which are noteworthy for them alone.

Deepan Sivaraman says that, when a scenographic work is set for performance, a contract is established between creator, user and viewer, or say between scenographers, performer and spectator. However, due to the persistent encounter with the creator's intention that stimulation has been a characteristic of spectators' response. Given the performance nature and the related happenings and over the constituencies of the spectators it can be said that this is possibly inevitable. The most important finding of this thesis is that directors and scenographers create scenography according to the demand of the idea, which they want to show but spectators take it or decode it very differently. The dissertation argues that how feeling, intention, design, are extended and reinterpreted by spectators. The idea of projection as a medium of

suggesting ideas has been a very useful method in thinking about how scenography communicates at the same time using conceptual means. The pictures and portrayals that represent nostalgia, notion of scenographic exchange are found with a substantial and tangible outcome for the spectators. As portrayed in nostalgia, these outcomes have broadened the visio-spatial realm that the director, scenographers had created by projecting and transforming the scenography of the main plays or performance into remarkable images and spaces of their own.

Lacan and Foster have articulated a psychological account of the artworks that may lead us to comprehend the extremely subjective motivations behind the creation and viewing of images. The scenographic image has developed and now become a screen. Using this, we can subdue and control the gaze of the world in order to maintain our fragile sense of ourselves. The motivation for creating images and viewing is part of our need to ‘construct and evolve a healthy reciprocity between the symbolized subject and its world’ (Crowther, 1993:5) So that the embodied subject might discover its own sense of self defined and realized.

The concept of scenographic punctum puts light on a subjective response. However, it has been observed that Barthes concept relates with the logic of Lacanian screen¹. Punctum is the minute moment of advancement, the rupture in the place surface of diligently controlled and maintained composition that can connect with each and every individual audiences and viewers. However, there is a logical argument between subjective and wider cultural sensibilities. It can be observed that ‘In performance’, individuals are also part of a collective and their responses to scenographic images are formed by shared cultural perception as well as their subjective understandings. It is this fact that reflects and shows the ethical dimension of the scenographic operation. The scenographic interchange is established when structural ideas are anticipated and practical experiences interact with each other. According to Lefebvre the “non-symbols and signs” of representational spaces (1931:39) a novel prospect of art was introduced

¹ McKinney, Joslin. *The nature of communication between scenography and its audiences*. England : University of Leeds, 2008, P-85.

through extension and communication between various medium of art. The scenographic space does not only represent the conventional perception of the world but it also executes through structural mediums which exercise our aesthetic senses. It can thus be said that audience by anticipating and concluding becomes a partner creator of scenography. The visuals represent the idea in a perfect manner. They become scenographers themselves when they acknowledge the physical and emotional observation and a new thought emerges about the work of art.

The audience was provided with chance of becoming scenographers at *Ubu Roi* (2007) while performance was taking place. The group in the audience reacted extemporaneously when one of the performers was hit on the hand with a long bamboo stick in the concentration camp. The response of the spectators are very different. As a spectator I felt that we are in the camp. The activity did not give much time for reflection and the moment of scenographic realization cannot be acknowledged often. This helps to understand that through medium of play we can delve into the potential implication of scenographic elements. It gives a better understanding of improvisation of scenographic ideas, through scenographic elements like light, structural interaction, space, costumes, material, multimedia and sound and so on. Finally, the material and metaphysics of theatrical images that establish a 'symbolic exchange' should be based on meaningful and ethical grounds. The viewers can be of help in creation of scenography only if they are exposed and in agreement with the image which they also create by a process of projection. When we discuss our own experience of images in regards to a performance, scenography becomes a medium of allegorical communication.

This research puts forward an understanding of the value and creative communication power of scenography in contemporary Indian theatre. This understanding is reflected in the academia and practices as well, through offering freedom to experiments and incorporate many other visual and sensual entities, the entities might be part of the main stream aesthetics or subaltern aesthetics (aesthetics of the marginalized) the materials might include garbage, electronics wastage, lather,

flesh, gutter water to multimedia technology. These practices promises to take contemporary Indian theatre to an era of much more creative and visual communication, where practioners understand the 'power of image'. The contemporary experimental theatre has broken many old and traditional aesthetical and practical stigma and is exploring new aesthetics which is more democratic and flexible in the politics of inclusion and exclusion.

Contemporary Indian theatre practice is constituted by new forms of the collaborative and participatory performance, which offer an exchange of ideas and innovations, that to collaborative thinking rather than mere individual authorship. These practices re-examine the roles of scenographer, director, performer and spectator as well. If the dissertation were to be developed further, it might offer new directions to the possibilities of studying scenography as a means of transportation for the sensitivities, significations and larger social understanding of the contemporary generation of theatre-makers and spectators.

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