

**WITNESSING MOVEMENT:
INDIAN PEOPLE'S THEATRE ASSOCIATION (CENTRAL SQUAD)
AND GENDER POLITICS**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for award of the degree*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

SHARMISTHA SAHA



**SCHOOL OF ARTS AND AESTHETICS
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067**

2010



School of Arts & Aesthetics
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
New Delhi- 110 067, India

Prof. H.S. Shiva Prakash
Dean

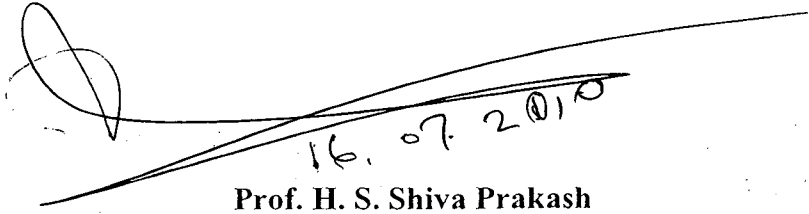
Telephone : 26742976, 26704061
Telefax : 91-11-26742976

CERTIFICATE

It is certified that the dissertation entitled '*Witnessing Movement: Indian People's Theatre Association (Central Squad) and Gender Politics*' submitted by Sharmistha Saha is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this university.

This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any other degree in this university or any other university and is her own work.

I recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

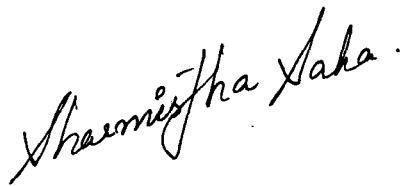


16.07.2010

Prof. H. S. Shiva Prakash
Supervisor/ Dean

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation titled '**Witnessing Movement: *Indian People's Theatre Association (Central Squad) and Gender Politics***' submitted by me at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in Theatre and Performance Studies, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other university or institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sharmistha Saha" with a period at the end. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sharmistha Saha

To my mother whose dreams got stalled between nations

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. H.S. Shiva Prakash who left me *to be* and enjoy an eternal *freedom* of readings and writings and appearances and disappearances. I am grateful to him that I did not reach any level of insanity of 'work pressure' that the process of dissertation writing *promises*. Nevertheless, his poetic injunctions were at the same time valuable for this research. I would also like to thank Dr. Bishnupriya Dutt who had initially suggested the topic to me. Especially in context to this research, mention needs to be made of her, Dr. Urmimala Sarkar and Samik Bandhopadhyay who have lived their lives through moments of IPTA and the world of performance in general and have very generously shared them with me. I am also grateful to Dr. Ira Bhaskar who had helped me to formulate the synopsis for this research work. I am indebted to Preeti Banerjee, PC Joshi (junior), Sunil Munshi, Vidya Munshi for having taken out reminiscences of the IPTA Central Squad from their decades old *archives* of memory. This research would not have been possible without their support. I also thank Dr. Pratibha Agarwal of the Natyashodh Sansthan, Kolkata, Dr. Sucheta Mahajan of the PC Joshi Memorial Archives of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, Mr. Arun Ghosh of Bhupesh Gupta Library, Kolkata, Mr. Ram Rehman and Mrs. Manini Chatterjee for their help and support. Special mention needs to be made of my sister Sushmita Saha who sent me books and articles from Kolkata whenever I needed them and my comrade in arms Tarique who kept my machines (laptop, hard drive, recordings etc.) running. My gang - Ananya, Anoushka, Sarah, Preema, Ramya, Ipsita and Amita brought me back to life often when I got lost in hibernations and taught me the importance of remaining intoxicated. I believe anything as serious as writing an MPhil dissertation has been possible only through this knowledge. I need to mention Gourab who was just there whenever I wanted him around. Soumick has been a source of inspiration from the very beginning and had initiated me to the world of 'serious' readings and I am thankful to him for the patient as also violent engagements. Finally, I am thankful to Soumya who opened me to a world of 'infinite thought' and has been present in my work and life in more than ways I know of.

Contents

| | |
|---|---------------|
| List of Illustrations | 1 |
| Introduction | 2- 11 |
| Chapter I: Women and the Central Squad: Context, Constitution and | |
| The Commune | 12- 50 |
| A new governmentality | 12 |
| <i>Mayer Jaat</i> | 15 |
| Identity and Difference | 22 |
| Nostalgia for the future | 26 |
| Conversion(s) | 30 |
| Death as representation | 36 |
| The Commune | 42 |
| Chapter II: Artists, activists, communists or an inconceivable | |
| community? | 51- 78 |
| The activists | 52 |
| The artists | 62 |
| The communists | 68 |
| Chapter III: Freedom and IPTA Central Squad: Utopia, Nostalgia and the | |
| Promise | 79- 93 |
| Freedom | 79 |
| A whole way of struggle or a whole way of life | 82 |
| Nostalgia for the promise | 88 |
| The vestiges of an existential community | 91 |
| Conclusion | 94-97 |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | 98-103 |
| <i>Newspapers Magazines and Presentations</i> | 104-105 |
| <i>Websites</i> | 105 |
| <i>Interviews</i> | 106 |

WITNESSING MOVEMENT:

Indian People's Theatre Association (central squad) and gender politics

List of Illustrations

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Sketches of Zainul Abedin on the famine published along with an article on Abedin by Chittaprasad in People's War, Jan 21, 1945</i> | 38 |
| <i>Scenes of famine by Chittaprasad which was published along with his article on famine called 'Eastern Pakistan' in People's War, Sept 17, 1944</i> | 39 |
| <i>Call Of The Drum: 'Shanti as the nation's drummer: Sachin and Dina portray rallying of the nation's youth' by Chittaprasad published in People's War, Jan 21, 1945</i> | 55 |
| <i>A scene from 'Spirit of India': 'The hoarder with his clerk and servant' by Chittaprasad published in People's War, Jan 21, 1945</i> | 56 |
| <i>'India Immortal: Ballet depicting the story of our country and our people from early times to the present days, the background of our rich cultural heritage and the growing unity of our people to end foreign rule.' by Chittaprasad published in People's Age, Jan 6, 1946</i> | 57 |
| <i>'The Lambadi- a tribal folk dance' by Chittaprasad published in People's War, Jan 21, 1945</i> | 58 |
| <i>'Ramleela as performed in the U.P. villages.' by Chittaprasad (ibid)</i> | 59 |
| <i>Gandhi-Jinnah phir miley: 'Gandhi-Jinnah meeting – the full story in ballet' by Chittaprasad (ibid)</i> | 59 |
| <i>'Chathurang: Classical Dance of Tippera (Bengal). A form now dying out, but being revived by the troupe.' by Chittaprasad published in People's Age, Jan 6, 1946</i> | 60 |
| <i>'Gajan: A folk dance of rural Bengal, with a ballad relating the story of Shiva and Parvati. A moment during the competition between Shiva and Parvati, with Shiva depicting the mood of 'terror'' by Chittaprasad (ibid)</i> | 60 |
| <i>'Holi: The popular harvest dance in the villages of the United Provinces' by Chittaprasad (ibid)</i> | 61 |

INTRODUCTION

I

The story of Indian People's Theatre Association has been mostly seen as a story of failure and betrayal. But this failure and betrayal were both preceded by a sense of enigma, was guided by the promise of a Utopia and a conviction that the road that IPTA was taking was leading towards a Cultural Revolution. Therefore, the work that one finds around this movement which has been mainly carried out by people who have been directly associated with the movement itself, struggles to narrate the whole story, seeks to be precise and strives to be accurate. In that sense the literature around the IPTA are themselves testimonies by their respective writers and provide witness to the revolution that could be. In Latin there are two words for 'witness'. The first word 'testis', from which the word *testimony* derives, etymologically signifies the person who, in a trial or lawsuit between two rival parties, is in the position of a third party. The second word, 'superstes', designates a person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it¹. Niranjan Sen's '*Bharatiya Ganantya Sangher Itihash*' published in a series in the *Epic Theatre* magazine from April-May 1978 onwards, Sudhi Pradhan's *Marxist Cultural Movement in India* first published in 1979, Sajal Roychoudhury's '*Ganantya Katha*' published again in a series from October 1984 onwards in the magazine *Ganantya* are the third parties whose testimonies as histories of the IPTA aim at the acquisition of facts for a trial- a trial that seeks the perpetrator of failure of IPTA. Niranjan Sen the ex-General Secretary of the IPTA writes-

'Once Mr. Sudhi Pradhan had come to Patna to meet me and had asked for information in order to write a book on IPTA at an all India level. But I did not want to associate myself with a book written by some other person because I was not sure of his interpretation of history of IPTA in his book.'²

¹p.17, *The Witness, Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, Giorgio Agamben, Zone Books, New York, 1999

²p.21, originally in Bangla in *Bharatiya Ganantya Sangher Itihash*, Niranjan Sen, *Epic Theatre*, April-May 1978

Sudhi Pradhan, former member of the IPTA in the Foreword to the Marxist Cultural Movement in India accuses-

‘Niranjan Sen seems to be in good company when he, in August 1978 issue of ‘Epic Theatre’ writes ‘This is not a historical document of the activities of the IPTA or a collection of day to day reports of the activities of the Association in various provinces or a political and cultural treatise’. Then what is this and why call it ‘The History of IPTA’? He has claimed that his right to relate these things has originated from his long association with IPTA. ‘I was the member of the All India Committee right from the beginning’. That this statement is not true can be learnt from page 132 of this book. In May 1943 Delhi had no IPTA committee.’³

Darshan Choudhury’s ‘*Gananatya Andoloner Prothom Parjay*’ first published in 1982 (and later *Gananatya Andolan* which has a broader scope) and Malini Bhattacharya’s monograph ‘*Gananatya Andolan o Natyakalar Rupantar Bhabna: 1942-47*’ later translated by her as *The Indian People’s Theatre Association: A Preliminary Sketch of the Movement and the Organization 1942-47* published in the Sangeet Natak Akademi journal of October-December 1989 claim to be Marxist accounts of the IPTA movement which take ‘it for granted (here) that such a movement, involving a change in certain dramatic forms, is possible and did happen at the time... (also) there being a close, though indirect and intricate relationship between the above mentioned change and a crucial shift in the political-economic situation.’⁴ Both these accounts look at the historical material conditions under which the movement happened but what they fail to identify is the ‘lack’, the ‘crisis’ that led to a sense of betrayal and failure that pervades the consciousness of those associated with the movement. Especially, that of the female subjects who were ‘witness’. On the other hand Dilip Ghosal’s *Gananatya ki o keno*, Sunil Dutta’s *Natya andoloner tirish bochhor* are rather celebratory accounts that do not engage with the ‘lack’/ ‘crisis’ at all. Within the narrative of all these accounts that see the IPTA as part of a process of ‘change’ rather than ‘transition’, the ‘change’ is seen as the inauguration of politicization for the colonized. ‘Assuming’ as Malini Bhattacharya does, the great

³p.xxii, Foreword, *Marxist Cultural Movement in India: Chronicles and Documents (1936-1947)*, Compiled and edited by Sudhi Pradhan, National Book Agency Pvt Ltd. July 1979

⁴p.3, *The Indian People’s Theatre Association: A Preliminary Sketch of the Movement and the Organization 1942-47*, Malini Bhattacharya, Sangeet Natak, 1989

mode-of-production narrative as given, these authors attempt at creating a chronological account of events within the same discourse of 'glorification' of 'that which could be'.

This Research Project aims at locating the 'crisis/lack' within the Indian People's Theatre Association focusing on the *politics of gender*.

II

When we talk about a movement like that of the *Indian People's Theatre Association* (IPTA) for which the platform of articulation of the 'inexplicable' moment of the famine became performance- the difficulty for a researcher becomes twofold raising a few questions. Firstly, as has been explained earlier, that the *liminality* between possibility and impossibility to explain an event like that of the famine- the 'birth-time' of IPTA raises the question of truth in historical knowledge itself- a knowledge which according to Agamben gives rise to an 'aporia' and secondly, the *liminality* between the possibility and impossibility to explain the event of performance-performance that defines the work of the IPTA. 'Performance's only life is the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself disappearance'⁵

A third problem of accessing the 'Real' is raised by Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* which formulates the method and program of his research through the foundation of the theory of statements (énoncés). In this book he elucidates neither sentences nor propositions but 'statements' that is not the text of discourse but its taking place. Aware of the ontological implications of his project he writes – 'the statement is not therefore a structure...; it is a function of existence' (Foucault, p.86). Thus 'statement' for him is enunciation which is not a thing determined by real, definite properties; it is, rather pure existence, the fact that a certain being- language

⁵p.146; *The Ontology of Performance: representation without reproduction; Unmarked the politics of performance*; Peggy Phelan; Routledge; London and New York; 2001

takes place. Given the system of the sciences and the many knowledge(s) that, inside language, define meaningful sentences and more or less well formed discourses, archaeology claims as its territory the pure taking place of these propositions and discourses, that is, the 'outside' of language, the brute fact of its existence. What gives his inquiry its incomparable efficiency is its refusal to grasp the taking place of language through an 'I', a transcendental consciousness to the extent of an equally mythological psychosomatic. Instead, Foucault decisively poses the question of how something like a subject, an 'I', or a consciousness can correspond to statements, to the pure taking place of language. The subject Foucault writes 'is a particular, vacant place that may in fact be filled by different individuals... If a proposition, a sentence, a group of signs can be called 'statement', it is not therefore because, one day, someone happened to speak them or put them into some concrete form of writing; it is because the position of the subject can be assigned. To describe a formulation *qua* statement does not consist in analyzing the relations between the author and what he says (or wanted to say, or said without wanting to); but in determining what position can and must be occupied by any individual if he is to be the subject of it' (Foucault, pp. 95-96) In this way the question 'Who is speaking?' becomes unimportant to the 'vacant place' the subject takes. Therefore the subject cannot take itself as an object by stating itself. There can be thus no archaeology of the subject in the sense in which there is an archaeology of knowledges. The moment the subject is marked by infamy, the encounter with power reveals human existences that would otherwise have left no traces of themselves. It is in this instance that the subject becomes 'witness' to life itself beyond all biography. It is this 'witness' of the subject- h(is/er) testimony that becomes the system of relations between the inside and outside of *langue*, between the sayable and unsayable in every language i.e. between a potentiality of speech and its existence, between the possibility and impossibility of speech. The subject is situated within these disjunctions. The relation between language and its existence i.e. *langue* and the archive⁶ demands subjectivity as that which, in its very possibility of speech, bears witness to an impossibility of speech. This is why subjectivity appears as witness even for those who cannot speak and I would add even for those

⁶ Foucault defines the archive as 'the general system of the formation and transformation of statements' (Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 130). In the strict sense archive is the storehouse that catalogues the traces of what has been said, to consign them to future memory.

incomprehensible events and for those moments of performance that are uncontainable. Hence experience of the IPTA performers become significant in mapping the performances of the Central Squad. Dina Gandhi recollects, 'We had to get up 4o'clock at dawn. The rehearsals for classical dance would go on for three-four hours. Then after a complete rehearsal there used to be a break between 9o'clock to 10o'clock. The breakfast would be *daliya* or *darij*, milk, two pieces of bread, and egg. The one who needed more food for reasons of health would be provided accordingly. Then from 10o'clock would start preparation for costume-making. This time was used for ballet dance. From 1o'clock to 2o'clock it was time for bathing, lunch and then sleep for an hour. Again from 3o'clock to 5o'clock would continue discussions regarding production, education on personal matters, preparation, reading, political classes, preparation for costume and other things. The group would move on with the entire program' (in Sova Sen, pp. 60-61). Such a rigorous schedule had to be maintained by all the members which resulted in brilliant performances. Reba Roychoudhury in her interview with Khaled Choudhury at Kolkata recalls that when Sarojini Naidu saw her singing- 'Suno Hind ke Rehne Walo...' she had tears in her eyes and had come to meet her backstage to congratulate her. The audience appreciation was equally exceptional as she remembers how the women of Punjab content with their performances would gift their gold jewellery for the cause of IPTA.⁷ Gul Bardhan reminisces, 'When we were in the Central Squad we were given five rupees per month as pocket allowance. Food was provided by the Party. With Shanti-da amongst us, every Sunday could not be a holiday. But once in a while we would get a holiday and I would run to Bombay to see three films one after another in the four-anna section. And at twelve o'clock at night I would stealthily climb a tree and enter the bungalow. Abani-da used to visit us around ten o'clock at night to see whether the whole group was in bed or not. So I used to arrange the bed beforehand in such a way that it looked as if someone was sleeping in it... Other members would go and spend their five rupees on a good meal. I had no interest in food and I wanted to spend that five rupees differently. I liked to see and read and observe. I was brought up that way.' (Gul Bardhan, p.41) From these narratives one can fill up the vacant space of the commune where the IPTA members lived, whose (commune's) *being* is now only reminiscent in the memories of the members. Although these members

⁷ As told to Khaled Choudhury by Reba Roychoudhury, from the Archive at Natyasodh, Kolkata

happened to share the same space of the commune at Andheri and also came across the same events of life, the same moments of performance, but nevertheless, the witness they provide not only fill up the caesura left in knowledge of the *being* of the commune but also adds to the discourse of the Left cultural movement in India as also many such discourses of the period.

III

This research work mainly deals with two important discourses – one is the discourse of ‘women’s question’ or *stri swadhinata* which as Sumit Sarkar has pointed out rightly develops the understanding on women and raises issues of their emancipation in the light of modern liberal thinking; the other discourse which develops in colonial India is the discourse of *freedom*. What is freedom? What is freedom for women? Given that the questions of women’s freedom and the nation’s freedom were often coalesced, as the freedom of the mother – the woman from not only colonial misrule but all sorts of societal ignorance and backwardness become significant. But this study has limited the paradigm of understanding these two discourses or fields of knowledge in the light of the Marxist cultural movement during that period namely the Central Cultural Squad of the Indian People’s Theatre Association which was one of the dominant cultural movements between 1943-1946/47. The formation of the Indian People’s Theatre Association was formally declared in the first All India Conference of the Communist Party of India (CPI) after the ban on it by the Colonial Government was lifted as a result of the CPI’s support to the Allied group whose part was Britain in the Second World War. Influenced by European modernism, ‘living newspaper’ form of theatre of China which was anti-imperialist in nature, ‘living newspaper’ form used in America in support of Roosevelt’s ‘New Deal’ programme influenced the formation of various cultural squads which believed that the ‘richness’ of the folk forms of India could do the same work of mobilization as ‘living newspaper’ theatre forms in China and America were doing and also strive for the new like European modernism. This work of these cultural squads was being supported by the left in India in the early 1940’s. (Niranjan Sen, p.23)⁸ Niranjan Sen writes, ‘In 1943 between 23rd May and 1st June the celebrations that happened (at the

⁸ in *Bharatiya Gananatya Shangher Itihas*, Epic Theatre, April- May 1978

wake of the first national conference of the CPI) and finally on 1st June 1943 when the Indian People's Theatre Association's first all India committee got formed, the robust voices of joy of the young artists and writers echoed in the Sundarbai Hall of Bombay (where the formal inauguration of the IPTA took place).⁹ Although the regional IPTA's had started functioning from that time onwards in various parts of India but the IPTA Central Squad was formed much later when the Bengal Squad of the IPTA had come to perform at Bombay to collect funds for the Bengal famine. Puran Chandra Joshi (PC Joshi) the then general secretary of the CPI writes, 'The early dramas produced by the IPTA had vigour and opened up new horizons but inevitably suffered from amateurishness. What made the IPTA really well-known then and famous later was their choir of patriotic songs from all the languages of India together with folk songs with a social content and moving tunes... We had deliberately adopted the policy of young Left intellectuals with cultural talent, to learn, perform and popularize the folk heritage of the various parts of our vast and ancient land... The Bengal famine, and following it a small Bengali cultural squad that was invited to Bombay in mid-1944 to collect money for famine relief, proved itself the catalytic agent for the rise of the IPTA in Bombay. The Bengal squad was led by Benoy Roy... Their songs were a wonderful selection, inspiring and stirring. They had also composed new patriotic songs in folk style... The Bombay IPTA under the guidance of the Central Communist Leadership was to act their host. The IPTA had already earned the patronage of Prithvi Raj Kapoor, Mulk Raj Anand, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas and the like. They together produced a very ambitious plan of a huge mass show with the Bengal Squad as the central attraction and all the Bombay Squads thrown in with their best items. The stage of the Maharashtrian Stage Centenary right on Chowpati sea beach had been made available... I consulted others in the cultural world, the party, and the mass leaders on whom would fall the main organizational burden... The variety cultural programme was put up, with the Bengal famine as the central theme. A Bengali himself Shanti Bardhan, straight from the Uday Shankar Cultural Centre, had helped to compose a simple and stirring dance on the famine, *Bhookha Nritya*, performed as a duet by Usha and Panupal. The Bengal squad had brought with them the hindi version, *Antim Abhilasha*, of the already famous Bengali dramatist Bijon Bhattacharya's one-act play on the famine, *Jaban-bandi* (in Bengali)... The rest

⁹ p.21, *Bharatiya Ganantya Shangher Itihas*, Epic Theatre, August 1978

was a panoramic presentation of Indian nationalism and its rise... In the audience were ladies from the Tata and Wadia industrial houses, professors of various colleges, artists and writers, both those already famous and also those who were rising, and representatives of every strata and regional group in Bombay...A fabulous sum was collected on the spot. Prithvi Raj Kapoor led the collection squad daily... The cultural performance in solidarity with Bengal led to another fruitful result besides establishing the worth and promise of the IPTA performers. The pioneer artist Uday Shankar had closed down his Almora Centre... A few of Uday Shankar's leading lieutenants were in the audience watching the IPTA show and they were moved to their depths. They together with the IPTA cadres and Parvathi¹⁰ and after several consultations evolved a scheme with which they came to me – a proposal to start a Central Ballet Troupe of the IPTA with the Bengal Squad as its nuclei, talented individuals from the various Bombay IPTA groups, and a few from Uday Shankar's Centre to impart professional expertise and train the amateurish IPTA cadre.'¹¹Therefore, the IPTA Central Squad was started at the wake of the Bengal Famine which played an important role to deem the British rule in India as illegitimate. It was to achieve more 'professional expertise' in the work of 'freedom' not only from the British but also from various societal norms within the wider panorama of world politics that the Central Squad was started. The song sung in this combined programme of the IPTA Bengal Squad and Bombay Squad '*Suno Hind ke rehne walo suno suno*' is an example of a wager to the 'people' of India - '*Tum hindu ho ya muslim ho*' - who are hindus and muslims - '*tum hosh mein ayo*' - and a plead to them to come to their senses.

IV

I begin this study with the understanding of the idea of the 'modern', the 'liberal democratic' system and the idea of a 'federal government'. The first chapter deals with these ideas drawing from Carl Schmitt's understanding of *The Concept of the Political* and *Political Theory of Representation*. The idea of a one nation did not exist in India and even during the revolt of 1857, the idea of the nation had not

¹⁰ Parvathi Krishnan who was then the personal secretary of PC Joshi

¹¹ pp.63-65, *Balraj Sahni – An intimate portrait* by PC Joshi in *A dedicated and Creative Life*, ed. PC Joshi, Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 1974

evolved but it was a revolt that happened as a result of the joint efforts of the different royal states in the sub-continent which was instigated by the Sepoy Mutiny at Barrackpore on the grounds of religious discrimination and disrespect of indigenous faith. Through the latter annexation of the various princely states of India and imposition of a federal structure under the aegis of the Government of Great Britain that such a unitary idea evolved. This chapter also focuses on the genealogy of the discourse of women's emancipation or *stri swadhinata* and the relegation of the women within a 'biopolitical' understanding of gender. Finally, it moves through a panorama of discourses and *conversion(s)* in the post-1857 era and the rise of the idea of a nation that was moving fast into declaring itself 'sovereign' and the British rule as illegitimate. Various events, *conversion(s)* led to actions that aimed at transgressing not only political boundaries but also boundaries of the 'self' or subjectivities. In this chapter, I focus on such transgressions mainly by women in the context of the momentous moments of the 1940's – the war, the famine etc. – and finally through a Brechtian de-familiarization, new subjectivities were created at the wake of existing contextuilities¹². The chapter ends with a conscious compilation of experiences in the Commune which was set up at Andheri in Bombay for the Central Squad and laying out an impression of what might have been the Commune where the various 'archaeologies' (in the Foucauldian sense) came together to give rise to a movement that changed not only the cultural scenario in modern India but also the subjects within that commune. The second chapter looks at these changes that occur creating new subjectivities through the performances, performativities and thoughts within and outside the commune with a focus mainly on the women as activists, artists or the communists. The idea of the communists is further evaluated in the light of the word 'communism' from which the word 'communists' come to being. The chapter does not aim at any evaluation of the understanding of gender within any separate discourse of Marxism and gender but rather tries to limit itself within the pervasive understanding of *stri swadhinata* and then attempts to understand the nature of human gatherings, formations, institutions at the wake of changing subjectivities or 'roles' and to reactive 'sites'. The third chapter focuses on the concept of freedom and tries not to create any reductive notion or binaries of nationalist conception of freedom

¹² which means the propensity of an event to achieve different meanings/readings according to the context in which it occurs

versus communist understanding of freedom but pushes further the idea of *freedom* to its philosophical maximum and striving to grasp what 'promise' that holds for the women.

Thus, the study does not become a feminist interrogation of certain concepts and ideas like the 'modern', 'liberal', 'federal', 'artist', 'activist', 'communist', 'utopia', 'nostalgia', 'freedom' etc. but looks at the genealogy of the discourse of *stri swadhinata* within the ambit of the Central Squad and maximizes this discourse to a free end or a *freedom* from its own parameters. In that sense in studying human actions that are capable of 'revolution' it takes the risk to see if there is any possibility of a thinking that generates the same effects and can cut across discourses even that of *freedom*, making no 'promise' of any success or achievement.

✂ CHAPTER I

Women and the Central Squad: Context, Constitution and the Commune

I

A new governmentality¹³: 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive.

But to be young was very heaven.'

Writing about his visit to the post-revolution Soviet Russia with his father Motilal Nehru in 1927, Jawaharlal Nehru quoted these famous lines in the title page of his book *Soviet Russia: some random sketches and impressions*, from William Wordsworth's 'The Prelude' which was Wordsworth's perspective on the French Revolution. His exultant articulation over his Soviet experience where 'workers and peasants sit on the thrones of the mighty' is exemplar of a rising generation of students and youth in the middle and late 20's who were increasingly becoming aware of the international currents and a need to combine nationalism with *social justice*. The idea of social justice was not something new to this generation. It was a result of

¹³Michel Foucault in his study of the 'genealogy of the subject' introduces a 'kind of autocritique'. Borrowing from Habermas he says that one can identify three major types of techniques in human societies: 1) the techniques which allow one to produce, transform, manipulate things 2) the techniques which allow one to use sign systems 3) the techniques which allow one to determine the behavior of individuals, to impose certain wills on them, and to submit them to certain ends or objectives. This third category is also known as *techniques of domination*. Foucault writes that his study of sexuality made him aware that apart from these three techniques, there also exists a fourth technique 'which permit individuals to perform, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in such a way that they transform themselves, modify themselves, and reach a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on.' He calls this 'techniques' or 'technologies of the self'. According to him if one has to study the genealogy of the subject, then one has to consider the interaction between the *technologies of domination* and the *technologies of the self*. He writes 'The contact point where the individuals are driven (and known) by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves (and know themselves). It is what we can call, I think, government... it is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which impose coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself.' (*The Politics of Truth, Michel Foucault, Semiotext(e), 1997*)

In this study I am trying to understand such processes or governmentalities that created subjects that could be categorized as Indian, and especially the formation of the female subject as the *bhartiya nari* or Indian woman. It is interesting how Gandhi also talks about such government – *swaraj* as it were, or governing oneself (and in doing so he also talks about the government of the female self) – an imperative according to him for the formation of a *free* India.

an encounter with, that which often has been termed, the 'modern'¹⁴. Rabindranath Tagore on the death centenary of Raja Rammohun Roy in 1933 entitled Roy as the 'Inaugurator of the Modern Age'¹⁵ in India'¹⁶. Rajendra Vora notes that the reformers mostly composed of the 'Bhadralok in Bengal, the Brahmans in Madras and the Brahmans and Prabhus in Bombay Presidency' (Vora in Pantham and Deutch ed., p. 92). A detailed study of the reformers themselves and their thought is beyond the scope of this research, however the purpose here is to point out to the fact that from the late 18th century onwards the 'social' emerged as that with which *one*¹⁷ could engage, in order to bring about shifts within it, creating space for modern politics to emerge. In an interview with Pratibha Agarwal on 28th August 1984, Shanta Gandhi, a performer in the IPTA Central Squad, remembers her grandfather Jadavji Maoji Gandhi who significantly contributed in the foundation of 'Dakhshinamurti', much

¹⁴It is interesting how the term 'modern' which is commonly used in opposition to 'traditional' or 'classical' becomes a *problematique* in the colonial context where the 'modern' also comes into existence through an awareness of the 'traditional' and 'classical' and an incorporation of both. Paul de Man explains 'modernity' borrowing from Nietzsche as that which 'invests its trust in the power of the present moment as an origin, but discovers that, in severing itself from the past, it has at the same time severed itself from the present.' Therefore modernity becomes a discovery, an encounter, an occurrence. On the other hand 'modernism' becomes conscious of its own strategies 'in the name of a concern for the future – it discovers itself to be a generative power that not only engenders history, but is part of a generative scheme that extends far back into the past' (*Literary History and Literary Modernity*), Paul de Man, *Daedalus*, Vol.99, No.2, *Theory in Humanistic Studies* (Spring, 1970), pp.384-404)

¹⁵ Here an inauguration of the 'Modern Age' could be understood as the initiation of the formation of a schema – conscious of its own strategies – 'modernism' within politics as it were.

¹⁶ As quoted by Thomas Pantham from Rabindranath Tagore, 'Inaugurator of Modern Age in India,' in *The Socio-Religious and political Thought of Rammohun Roy*; pg. 32, *Political Thought in Modern India*; ed. Thomas Pantham and Kenneth L. Deutsch; Sage Publications, New delhi; 1986

¹⁷ Now here the 'one' was not anyone as I have quoted from Rajendra Vora. It was a certain social group learned in the Hindu Scriptures, Sanskrit like Raja Ram Mohan Roy (founder of Brahma Samaj), Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Dayanand Saraswati (who founded the Arya Samaj and would later influence the work of organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS) and also influenced by the Western liberal doctrines of the likes of Herbert Spencer or even the radical egalitarian ideas of Rousseau and Proudhon like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, MG Ranade (who was associated with the Prarthana Samaj, Social Conference, Poona Sarvajanic Sabha, Indian National Congress and Industrial Conference) or influenced by Voltaire, Hume, Jeremy Bentham and Thomas Paine as were the students of the rationalist free thinker Derozio or even the ones who were educated by Christian missionaries like Mahatma Phule (advocate of 'Sarvajanic Ishwar Pranit Satya' as a substitute of Hinduism). Muslim political thought like Hindu ideas exhibited the same reformist, liberal, extremist, radical and secular trends. Later, the egalitarian ideas of social justice of Ambedkar (who studied at Columbia University, New York), the humanist leaning of Rabindranath Tagore (coming from a feudal background who got the opportunity to travel extensively) and the Marxist world view of MN Roy (he participated in the formation of the Mexican Communist Party and also came in contact with the International Communist fraternity) were influenced by their encounters with the West.

before Montessori school education system came to India. Although they belonged to a mercantile Gujarati family but due to her grandfathers 'enlightened' thinking, her father later pursued higher education to become an engineer. She says- 'Instead of that (family business) this particular branch of our family sort of bifurcated and came into this'. Thus with the 'political' thought and act often supported by the 'Protestant, commercial, maritime and *free* (italics are mine)' British Imperialists'¹⁸, a new social collective was emerging in the colonial subcontinent which increasingly found it necessary to 'appear' as the 'political subject' and be *represented*¹⁹ even *politically*.²⁰ Carl Schmitt in his *The Concept of the Political* argues that political representation explores the way in which the people (or a constituency) are present in governmental action, even though they do not literally act for themselves. He further argues that representation can bring about the political unity of the state, but only if the state itself is properly 'represented' by the figure or person of the sovereign. In case of the colonial subcontinent, the British sovereign state and institutions supported by it by the end of the 18th century had started to train various sections of the society, which was the upper caste/class at times and also the lower caste/class on other occasions (mostly trained by the missionaries) who started to emerge as the ones who would 'represent' the 'new people' of a 'new society' with the aid of the sovereign state. Schmitt further argues that the idea of representation is so completely governed by

¹⁸Hegel understood the ideology of the British Empire not as a concept but as a conception. In his Introductory lectures of a philosophy of world history he argued that the true history of the nation consists in the process whereby the *Geist's* (translated as spirit, mind or ghost) conception of itself is realized in the various, interconnected activities of that nation such as state, religion, art, justice and foreign affairs. He illustrated the British conception of the empire in the long eighteenth century as derived from Britain's historic achievements as a maritime power, as commercial economy and as a parliamentary democracy with a common law tradition. Taking his cue from Hegel Armitage quotes Seymour -'The success of the coincident campaigns for Parliamentary reform and the abolition of slavery within the empire merely confirmed what Britons had known about themselves at least since 1688: that they were the greatest defenders of liberty within Europe and within the wider British Imperial world.' Armitage continues 'The various British empires of the 19th century were multiethnic and multidominational, polyglot and polymorphous and defied capture within any single definition. However, the conception of the British empire as Protestant, commercial, maritime and *free* lingered vestigially but reassuringly.' In David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 195-198

¹⁹'Representation means the making present of something that is nevertheless not literally present'-Hanna Pitkin 'The Concept of Representation', University of California Press, London, 1967

²⁰ In the aftermath of the Revolt of 1857, a need was felt by the British Government to incorporate the Princely class within its system in order to maintain its hold and economic exploit over its biggest colony. The growing administrative work also made it necessary to include the natives. In fact there was a growing demand from the natives during this period to hold simultaneous ICS exams in England and in India. (Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947*, Macmillan India Ltd. 2006)

conceptions of personal authority that the representative as well as the person represented must maintain a personal dignity.²¹ Therefore in order to represent within the British sovereign state, one had to be if not as powerful and dignified as the colonizer but *capable* enough to be able to represent that ‘dignity’. Influenced by the enlightenment logic, this capacity to represent came from being educated and thus civilized. Therefore, on the one hand one had to be educated in order to be dignified/civilized and be capable of representing and on the other hand to represent one needed to be dignified/civilized which was possible through education. Irrespective of caste, religion or political view this circular logic was applicable²², although receiving education for the religious minorities or backward castes was not an easy task, given the already existing socio-economic disparities. Nevertheless, different communities mainly constituted on the basis of religion and caste²³, started to *appear* in the ‘new society’ through reforms and reorganization under the aegis of the sovereign state which was ‘Protestant, commercial, maritime and *free*’.

II

Mayer Jaat: Within all the reform and reorganizational activities, one issue remained common to all the communities – Sumit Sarkar calls this the ‘Women’s question’²⁴. Women did not (rather they don’t) comprise a ‘community’ by themselves which would represent itself in the British sovereign state. They are inseparably the part of

²¹Carl Schmitt, in *Roman Catholicism and political form*, as referred to by Duncan Kelly in p.116 , *Carl Schmitt’s Political theory of Representation*, Journal of the history of ideas, Vol.65, No. 1, Jan 2004

²²Although, some political thinkers of the period like Dayanand Saraswati would argue that ‘Say what you will, the indigenous native rule is by far the best. A foreign government, perfectly free from religious prejudices, impartial towards all the natives and the foreigners, kind, beneficent and just to natives like their parents though it may be, can never make the people perfectly happy’ did not nullify the idea of the existence of a unified and equally abstract sovereign subject. Though structurally, the questions of sovereignty and of representation are homologous, the historical fact is, the actual situations of representation were, while not identical still derived from the logic of British imperial sovereignty. (the website of Arya Samaj - <http://www.aryasamaj.org/newsite/node/721>)

²³Socio-economic disparities already existing between religions and castes, which were often encouraged by the British sovereign state to maintain its hegemony, led to the assumption of these very caste and religious identities. See Sumit Sarkar’s *Modern India: 1885-1947* for a comprehensive study on such existing disparities and ‘divide and rule’.

²⁴P.71, *The ‘Women’s Question’ in Nineteenth Century Bengal; A critique of Colonial India*; Sumit Sarkar; Papyrus, 1985

the composition of any community. James Mill in his *History of British India* argued that women's position could be used as an indicator of society's advancement. He wrote- 'Among rude people, the women are generally degraded; among civilized people they are exalted.'²⁵ Among the educated section of the new society, this became a reason for enough uneasiness. Those who accepted the idea that society's ills could be traced to the oppressed condition of women saw female emancipation or *Stri Swadhinata* as a necessary step to be able to represent one's community adequately in order to correspond to the *dignitas*²⁶ of the sovereign state. Therefore, one could view the women's question emerging from the late 18th century as revolving around the discourse of *stri swadhinata*. 'Rammohun Roy wrote of women who were 'forced upon the pyre', 'bound' with ropes so they would perish with their husbands. Vidyasagar wrote of customs which had 'hampered the evolution of her (woman's) faculties,' and D.K. Karve wrote of a caste widow who 'fell victim to the passion of some brute''²⁷. These reformers also wanted to bring about reform regarding their concerns through legislation under the British sovereign state. Although Bankim Chandra Chatterjee had little faith in the efficacy of legislation to bring about genuine reform of social institutions, however on the issue of polygamy he believed that 'reform, in order to succeed, must flow from a new moral consensus in society.'²⁸ Many women's organizations were constituted due to the efforts of their male counterparts who were motivated by the 'ideal of male-female equality', that worked to propagate women's education and eradicate injustice on women.²⁹ There was enough forethought on how to achieve *swadhinata* (emancipation/freedom) for

²⁵pp. 309-310, *The History of British India*, 2 vols. James Mill, Chelsea House, New York, 1968

²⁶*Dignitas* is a theological idea which carries a dual meaning of the dignity of God and the dignity of the office of the Vicar. Agamben drawing from Kantorowicz writes '*dignitas non moritur*' or '*dignitas* does not die'. In this case it also carries a dual signification - the dignity of the office of British sovereign state but also that of the Queen in whose name the state functions. (p.82-83, *State of Exception*, Giorgio Agamben, The University of Chicago Press, 2003) It is interesting to note that an orthodox rally of 10,000 at Benaras in 1892 ended with three cheers for the Sanatan Dharma and Queen Victoria. (Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947*, p.81)

²⁷Neera Desai in *Women in Modern India* as quoted by Geraldine Forbes, p.17; *Women in Modern India*; Cambridge University Press, 2009

²⁸p.87, *Culture and Power in the Thought of Bankim Chandra, Partha Chatterjee*, Political Thought in Modern India, ed. Thomas Pantham and Kenneth L. Deutsch, SAGE Publications, London, 1986

²⁹p. 66, *Women in Modern India*; Geraldine Forbes

the *stri* (female). Rammohun Roy, Vidyasagar, Dayanand Saraswati, Bankim Chandra and many others saw India as recovering from the dark ages which was brought about by Muslim rule and many foreign invasions in India³⁰. Uma Chakravarti argues that until recently a view of the Vedic past, when women were valued and occupied positions of high status, had stifled serious historical research on women's lives.³¹ Nevertheless, *stri swadhinata* could be discussed and argued over, only by the dignified/civilized male members of the community. Geraldine Forbes notes that in 1881 the court at Surat in western India tried Vijayalakshmi, a young brahmin widow, for killing her illegitimate child. Initially she was given a death sentence, later, on appeal, it was reduced to transportation for life and then reduced to five years. Tarabai Shinde (1850-1910) a marathi housewife, enraged by this incident wrote- 'So is it true that only women's bodies are home to all the different kinds of recklessness and vice? Or have men got just the same faults as we find in women?'. Forbes writes that her cry for equality was unheeded.³² Another pioneer in women's education and champion of women's right, Pandita Ramabai who accepted baptism at the age of twenty five after the death of her parents, brother, husband and close friend, was often criticized for her social work. She had established Sharada Sadan, a school for widows in Bombay which attracted high-caste hindu widows. In order to forestall criticism Ramabai formed an Executive Committee of reformers who were staunch hindus. This plan did not work and newspapers criticised her and her school. Balgangadhar Tilak's newspaper *Kesari* charged her with converting widows to christianity.(Forbes,p.46-49) When Haimabati Mitra, a child widow from Bengal asked for help from the Brahmo Samaj leaders seeking education, they looked for a bridegroom instead.(Forbes, p.69) The stage actress Binodini Dasi's dream of having a theatre by her own name could not be realised due to her low social status of being an actress, even after she had financed the foundation of the theatre which instead

³⁰Its highly possible that such a presumption that the dark ages were brought about by the Muslims along with other foreign invasions in India, was a result of the growing discord with the muslim community which was supported by socio-economic disparities as also British encouragement of such discord.

³¹*Whatever happened to the Vedic dasi?*; Uma Chakravarti in *Recasting Women*; ed. Kumkum Sanghari and Sudesh Vaid, Zubaan, 2006

³²p.22, *Women in Modern India*; Geraldine Forbes

came to be known as the 'Star Theatre' in Calcutta.³³ There are several other instances of the 19th century/early 20th century when women's action and thought were stopped or sidelined by the male reformers. Thought and action as *roles* within the 'new society' was to be brought about by education³⁴. So what should be the curriculum of education for the 'new women' of the 'new society' that would inculcate 'new roles' in the women as rightful members of a 'people' of the sovereign state? Mr. Oaten, director of Public Instruction in Bengal, urged women to decide what kind of education was suitable for Indian girls and then tell the government 'with one voice what they want, and keep on telling us till they get it.' As a result of this challenge Margaret Cousins of the All India Women's Conference sent circular letters to women leaders throughout India suggesting they organize local conferences to discuss educational issues. Each conference would prepare a memorandum on female education for presentation at an all-India Conference. The first conference was held at Poona in January of 1927. The majority of the women at the Conference agreed that the educational system should concentrate on production of educated wives and mothers but the need for educating women in the roles of doctors, professors and lawyers etc. – professions suited to the biopolitical categorization was also felt. Nevertheless, there was a general agreement that education should compliment gender roles. (Forbes, p.79-80) Although Mahatma Gandhi felt the need for women to participate in the national movement but he considered it necessary for women to take permission from their family. On the question of women he wrote- 'The (essential) function of women is... to be the queens of the household...running a home efficiently, caring for and educating children properly, steadily seeking to conceive and transmit new, proper, and higher ideals before they come under the influence of

³³ *Amar Katha o onnanno rochona*, Binodini Dasi, ed. Soumitra Chatterjee and Nirmalya Acharya, Subarnarekha, 1416 (bengali year)

³⁴ The foundation of Hindu College in 1816 was followed by the formation of Calcutta School Society which was to promote female education. Radha Kanta Deb, the secretary of this society, became a patron of female education and assisted in the formation of the Calcutta Female Juvenile Society founded by the Baptists in 1819. Many other schools were opened for girls with the help of the Church Missionary Society. Although these schools enjoyed the patronage of Hindu gentlemen and were stuffed with brahmin pundits, they failed to attract girls from upper castes. Nevertheless, the Church Missionary was more successful in South India. Although the moral and financial support of the colonial authorities was essential to the spread of female education, but it did not do much to guarantee schools for girls. The Brahma Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj, Theological Society were all in favour female education. (*Women in Modern India*; Geraldine Forbes)

others of the opposite sex... all these things represent work of the highest, most important, and most difficult kind that can be performed in this world'³⁵ In fact from as early as the late 18th century, a growing need was felt to classify women's role within the British sovereign state as women started to emerge as a political subject due to the need of the educated/'civilized' section to be able to represent itself and its community fully. Need for women's education was often validated on the grounds that- 'In the eyes of men of forthought and ambition, a woman trained on these lines to the profession of wifehood, is a far more desirable companion than an amateur wife. The training which a girl gets in her own home and under her own mother in India is admirable as far as it goes, but modern life has introduced many complexities to deal with for which a regular and systematic training is necessary'.³⁶

The post- first world war years were followed by three crucial constitutional reforms in British India among which was the Government of India Act of 1919. According to this was introduced, provincial autonomy and 'dyarchy', transferring certain functions of provincial governments like education, health, local bodies, agriculture to ministers responsible to legislative assemblies³⁷. As a result a number of educational institutes sprang up with local aid among which many were institutions for women. These institutions varied in their curriculum, language of instruction and socio-religious view according to their financing body or representative which or who could be Hindu conservative/liberal, Muslim conservative/liberal, non religious, anglophiles or anglophobes. Nevertheless, the role of women as has been discussed earlier remain clearly defined. The Arya Mahila Samaj imagined the ideal woman as an efficient

³⁵As quoted by Chandrakala Padia and SK Saxena in p.399,'Gandhi on Women and Liberty', *Feminism, Tradition and Modernity*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2002 from p.195, *Gandhi on Women* by Pushpa Joshi

³⁶As quoted by Forbes in *Women in Modern India* from 'Thackesay (sic) Women's University Convocation, Sir Visvesvaraya's convocation address, June 29, 1940, IAR

³⁷The Indian Councils Act of 1861 strengthened the Viceroy's authority over his Executive Council by substituting a 'portfolio' or departmental system for corporate functioning. The Imperial and local legislative Councils enlarged or set up by the same Act included a few non-official natives but were essentially decorative. Ripon's May 1882 resolution promised elected majorities and chairmen in local bodies, a promise which was implemented very slowly and incompletely. According to Sumit Sarkar such 'constitutional reform' was associated with two major strands of official policy: firstly, periodic attempts to 'rally the moderates' and secondly, skillful use of divide and rule techniques. He notes that recent studies of the United Provinces by Francis Robinson and of the Punjab by NG Barrier vividly reveal how the introduction of elected municipalities immediately sharpened Hindu-Muslim tensions in both provinces.

housewife, entering the public world to help during emergencies such as floods, famines and plagues. Within the Parsee community which had just emerged from plague in the early 19th century, work classes to teach social work among women were started. Muslim women were taught house work along with social work for poor women. 'Specifically, male reformers regarded the household as the primary focus and fundamental arena... These men wanted their wives to take part in activities outside the home: social work to help the unfortunate and relief work when disaster struck' (Forbes, p.68) These roles for the woman were naturalised and thus frozen through symbolic representation of the ontological function of the woman determined biologically as the Mother- life giver of the community and later the Nation; and also socio-politically - as the caregiver of the same. Nira Yuval-Davis argues in *Gender and Nation* that within the paradigm of the Nation, women's roles become symbolic border guards and embodiments of collectivity, while at the same time being its cultural reproducers. I would argue here that the image of *Bharatmata*, construed under similar biopolitical logic as has been explained above, plays a very significant role in making static the *role* of the woman within the British sovereign state *when the need to assert difference arose*³⁸ and having done that the 'women's question' within the discourse of *stri swadhinata* was resolved. With Bankim Chandra's hugely successful novel *Anandamath* first published in 1882, the idea of *Bharat* incarnated as the figure of the *Bharatmata*. '*Vande Mataram*' – a slogan borrowed from a song in the novel became hugely successful during the anti-colonial movement. But this sort of an iconic representation of the Nation as *Bharatmata* was found highly problematic by religious communities like the Muslims and other minority communities who did not believe in idolatry³⁹. In fact, Bankim's *Anandamath* was a call for Hindu nationalism (Tanika Sarkar), which was already taking shape from the late 18th

³⁸Here unlike many cultural theorists I would argue that representation of the community within the British sovereign state did not require to be a simultaneous process of differentiation vis-à-vis the state. Nationalist consciousness arose not as Gramscian passive resistance as has been argued by Partha Chatterjee but as a need to respond given socio-economic and political circumstances along with *aporias* of untelling 'events'. This will be dealt with later in detail in my research. Nevertheless, community consciousness already formed along religious and caste lines (which were socio-economically determined) during the period of Colonial rule, added to the formation of the Nationalist consciousness.

³⁹For a more detailed study refer to *Birth of a Goddess: 'Vande Mataram', Anandamath and Hindu Nationhood*, Tanika Sarkar, EPW, Sept 16, 2006

TH-19180

century onwards through community representations within the British sovereign state as has been argued earlier. When the need for unanimity on the idea of one nation of *one people* arose, the imagery of *Bharatmata* became awkward, although there was complete accord on the idea of women as subsumed by the *role* of the Mother. An interesting reference to this can be found in Rabindranath Tagore's novel '*Char Odhay*'⁴⁰, where the revolutionary woman figure *Ela* refers to the women folk as '*mayer jat*'. Now here, '*mayer jat*' cannot be translated as the community of mothers where *jat* could mean community in Bengali and *mayer-* of the mother, but here rather the expression means – woman as member of a community whose essential identity is that of the mother. It is also interesting to note here, that although in the novel, no direct reference to the *Ela*'s political stand is made, apart from the fact that she believes in '*desh kaji*' – work for/of the Nation and through modes of violent action, Sumit Sarkar points out that by the early 30's (Tagore finished writing the novel in June 1934), middle-class youth and students (which comprised many women) demanded complete independence and radical socio-economic changes; and often the ones associated with violent mode of action were influenced by Communistic ideas. At Calcutta in December 1928, Jawaharlal Nehru presided over a Socialist Youth Congress which called for independence as 'a necessary preliminary to communistic society'⁴¹. The idea of Communism struck the youth as a new idea and as opposed to 'strong Hindu religiosity of the earlier terrorists- militant atheism' (Sarkar, p.268) became more attractive and appropriate in the 30's and 40's given the famines, immense poverty and death of all peoples irrespective of their religion. But Communism as an idea could not affiliate itself with an iconic representation of the Nation as the 'Mother', therefore, the '*mayer jat*' expression could have been a more appropriate idiom which although frees women from the iconic mother imagery but nevertheless relegates the woman to a mother's *role*. This research project would delve into the issue of the '*role*' of women in Communist movement with special focus on Communist Cultural Movement – the IPTA Central Squad⁴², but before that

⁴⁰ *Char Odhay*, Rabindranath Tagore, Vishwabharati Grantha Bibhag, Kolkata, 1809(Bengali year)

⁴¹ Although he later changed his views under pressure from Mahatma Gandhi, p.266-67, *Modern India* 1885-1947

⁴² Although IPTA's association with the Communist Party of India (CPI) was not direct, it was a mass organization supported by the CPI



one correlated observation needs to be made in order to highlight certain methodological issues regarding this study.

III

Identity and Difference: Partha Chatterjee has been one of the most influential critics of the nationalist project in colonial Bengal. In his most significant contribution to reading of nationalism in India, *'Nation and its Fragments'*, he outlines his methodological premise through a critique of Benedict Anderson according to whom- 'the historical experience of nationalism in Western Europe, in the Americas, and in Russia had supplied for all subsequent nationalisms a set of modular forms from which nationalist elites in Asia and Africa had chosen the ones they liked.'⁴³ Chatterjee in his enlightened post-colonial force writes back- 'History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery... The most powerful as well as the most creative results of the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa are posited not on an identity but rather on *difference* with the 'modular' forms of the national society propagated by the modern West.' (Chatterjee, p.5) He further argues that- 'By my reading, anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within the colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power. It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains – the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the 'outside', of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed... The spiritual, on the other hand, is an 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity.' (Chatterjee, p. 6) Firstly, the *difference* that is realised in a colonised society comes through the formation of the *identity*. The identification of the *difference*, I would argue is not a conscious process that is postulated as contradistinctive to the colonial sovereign state but this happens through a process of political *representation* in the colonised dominion. Here by representation, borrowing

⁴³ p.5, *Whose imagined community?, Nation and its fragments*, The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus, Oxford University Press, 1997

from Schmitt, I mean something that assumes that, although every state form presupposes a structural *identity* between rulers and ruled, such *identity* can never be fully realized in practice and *identity* on the other hand presupposes the ‘unmediated’ unity of the people⁴⁴. I would argue here that it was the non-realization of *identity* that led to the realization of *difference* within the colonized natives – the difference which later was stimulated by socio-economic circumstances and events leading to *aporia* that an ‘unmediated’ unity of the people could be attained. Secondly, political sovereignty cannot exist at two levels within the same dominion as has been suggested by Chatterjee – a dominion he calls the ‘inner domain of sovereignty’. Schmitt argues that the interdependence of modern state and liberalism born out of Reformation and disputes over religious toleration corresponds with the rise of something approaching the theory of ‘possessive individualism’. Drawing from Abbé Sieyès that the nation’s⁴⁵ constitution was not a constituted or collective power but rather a constituent or individual power, he argues that liberalism’s foundation was in the private sphere where each one of the member of the people had to be a constituent of the power i.e. the Nation.(as referred to, by Duncan Kelly, p.119) As Sumit Sarkar has pointed out that the British Government in India was an autocracy of hierarchically organized officials, headed by the Viceroy and the State of Secretary, but gradually there was an attempt to liberalize the system, through induction of native representatives which was later often demanded by the ‘initiated’ and ‘qualified’ natives. Thirdly, the nationalist project cannot be reduced to binaries of the material outer domain where the West was sovereign and the spiritual inner domain where the East was trying to mark out its cultural identity, thereby East and West seen as two distinctive homogenous categories. But rather the formation of a cultural identity was a part of the non-realization of identification with the Colonizer, in this case the British sovereign state. Partha Chatterjee from his basic theoretical premise comes to his argument on women, which is my main concern here. He argues that ‘the relative unimportance of the women’s question in the last decades of the nineteenth century is to be explained not by the fact that it had been censored out of the reform agenda or overtaken by the more pressing and emotive issues of political struggle.

⁴⁴Carl Schmitt in *Verfassungslehre* as quoted by Duncan Kelly in p. 121, *Carl Schmitt’s Political theory of Representation*, Journal of the history of ideas, Vol.65, No. 1, Jan 2004

⁴⁵The idea of a federal government did not exist in the subcontinent till 1857-58, (Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947*)

The reason lies in nationalism's success in situating the 'women's question' in an inner domain of sovereignty...' (Chatterjee, p.117). I would argue here that the 'women's question' was not situated in the inner domain of sovereignty but it was resolved through a process of representation in the British sovereign state. As a member of the *people*, a woman was a constituent of the power i.e. the Nation. Her *role* was identified, and then through a *biopolitical* logic of birth giver and care giver arrested to the figure of the *Bharatmata*, as has been argued earlier. Although this *role* was suggestive of 'self-sacrifice, benevolence, devotion, religiosity and so on' which Chatterjee has called 'spiritual qualities', but it is not possible to clearly classify these qualities as they varied according to the community to which one belonged. The problem is augmented, when the question is that of the formation of a new community which is a *people comprising all communities* with different religious beliefs and also often no religious belief⁴⁶ at all. Here, by a people comprising all communities, I am referring to the idea of the Indian state that started shaping up in the early 20th century. 'An independence pledge was taken at innumerable meetings throughout the country on 26th January (1930), denouncing the British for having 'ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually', asserting that it was 'a crime against man and God' to submit any longer to such a rule, and calling for preparations for 'civil disobedience, including non-payment of taxes'.(Sarkar, p. 284) An 'unmediated unity' was felt by the demand of *Purna Swaraj* or total independence, which took birth from the realization of *difference* and the consolidation of an *identity* of being an Indian, thus, making the rule of the British sovereign state not only unacceptable but completely illegitimate. Even in the demand for *Purna Swaraj* the imagery of *Bharat* remained that of the mother, and women began to be popularly addressed as 'ma, bon' – the ones who are the mothers and sisters. Hemango Biswas⁴⁷ notes some songs sung during this period –

'Gandhi sajjito birat bahini

Nirbhoye choleche badha nahi mani

Bharater mukti kammo amader

⁴⁶ as we would see in case of those influenced by Communistic ideas

⁴⁷Hemango Biswas is a famous song writer and music director, singer who was a part of the Freedom movement and also joined the IPTA later. In an interview with Pratibha Agarwal on 15th August 1986

Esho esho sainik dakiche shenani

Laban shulko koroge bhongo

Chere dao amod chere dao rongo

Ahingsho montre achhadi ango

Dehoke shajae janani bhogni'

(A band of soldiers adorned with the presence of Gandhi/ walks silently without taking heed of any obstacles/ the freedom of *Bharat* (India) is what we desire/ come soldier, the band calls you/ break the law of paying the salt tax/ leave all your pleasures and play/ adorning yourself in the *mantra* (sacred words) of nonviolence/ *embellishing yourself only with your mothers and sisters*⁴⁸)

'E nohe kahini, e nohe swapna

Ashibe shedin ashibe re

Ekbar tora ma bolia dak'

(This is not a story nor a dream/ that day will surely come/ *only cry out for the mother once*)

Or, the very famous according to Hemango Biswas

'Tora bet mere ki ma bholabi

Amra ki mar shei chele

Dekhe roktarokti barbe shokti

Ke palabe ma chere

Jay jeno jibon chole'

(*Will you make us forget the mother by hitting/ are we such coward sons of the mother/ the sight of blood will give us strength/ who would escape leaving the mother behind/ even if life leaves us*)

⁴⁸Italics are mine

Even the IPTA CS songs refer to this imagery.

'Bharatbhumi janamdatri matrirupini

Taba chorone shoto shoto pronam ' (Spirit of India)⁴⁹

(The motherland Bharat/ India, the birth giver / we touch your feet a thousand times)

IV

Nostalgia for the future: 'THE REBEL (*harshly*): My name – an offence; my Christian name – humiliation; my status – a rebel; my age – the stone age.

THE MOTHER: My race – the human race. My religion – brotherhood.

THE REBEL: My race: that of the fallen. My religion... but its not you that will show it to me with your disarmament...

'tis I myself, with my rebellion and my poor fists clenched and my woolly head... (*Very calm*) I remember one November day; it was hardly, six months ago... The master came into the cabin in a cloud of smoke like an April moon. He was flexing his short muscular arms – he was a very good master – and he was rubbing his little dimpled face with his fat fingers. His blue eyes were smiling and he couldn't get the honeyed words out of his mouth quick enough. 'The kid will be a descent fellow,' he said looking at me, and he said other pleasant things too, the master – that you had to start very early, that twenty years was not too much to make a good Christian and a good slave, a steady, a devoted boy, a good commander's chain gang captain, sharp-eyed and strong-armed. And all that man saw of my son's cradle was that it was the cradle of chain gang captain.

We crept in knife in hand...

THE MOTHER: Alas, you'll die for it.

THE REBEL: Killed... I killed him with my own hands...

Yes, 'twas a fruitful death, a copious death...

⁴⁹ p.37, *Gananatya Katha*, Sajal Roychoudhury, Mitra and Ghosh Publishers Pvt Ltd, Kolkata, 1990

It was night. We crept among the sugar canes...

THE MOTHER: And I had dreamt of a son to close his mother's eyes.

THE REBEL: But I chose to open my son's eyes upon another sun.'⁵⁰

By the 20's disillusioned by the failure of the Congress to unequivocally take up demands of different sections or communities, Non-cooperators, Khilafatists, and labour, peasant, lower caste movement activists sought new roads to political and social emancipation (Sarkar, pp.237-253). The answer was found in violent action, following the examples set by the 1857-59⁵¹ and later the Irish Revolution and the Bolshevik Revolution. Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt in their statement made at the conclusion of their trial on 6th June, 1929⁵² said 'Can ordinances and safety bills snuff out the flame of freedom in India? Conspiracy cases trumped up or discovered and incarceration of all young men who cherish the vision of a greater ideal cannot check the march of revolution'⁵³. Motivated by a *force* driven by hope or a *nostalgia for the future*⁵⁴, as we saw in Césaire's play, events violent or non-violent and the rhetoric of the speech and art (Hemango Biswas remembers in the interview how they used to get strength or *moner bol* from songs as have been quoted earlier), revolutionaries crossed the liminal to a dynamic where according to Baz Kersaw, the

⁵⁰ Aimé Césaire: *Les Armes miraculeuses (Et les chiens se taisaient)*, as quoted in p. 68, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon, Penguin Books, 2001

⁵¹ The source of inspiration for national revolutionaries in the phase upto 1916, was the uprising of 1857 also known as the 'mutiny' or the 'India's first war of independence'. Karl Marx in the *New York Herald Tribune* wrote about the issue, a collection of which was later published in a book called *The First Indian war of Independence: 1857-59*. Sarvarkar attempted to write a historical account of the period. (p.3-4, *Development of ideology of the national revolutionaries*, G. Adhikari, Challenge: A saga of India's struggle for freedom, PPH, Jan, 1984)

⁵² They were executed in 1931 along with others as accused of the Lahore Conspiracy Case

⁵³ p.14, *ibid*

⁵⁴ According to Baz Kersaw *nostalgia* remains an inauthentic negative when it plays only over the past. It becomes a potential positive when it paradoxically engages the future. Drawing from Susan Stewart according to whom the prevailing motif of nostalgia is the erasure of the gap between nature and culture, Kersaw writes that erasure may be complete as an effect in certain performance practices, but the contradictory gap between nature and culture will always exist in principle, hence the need for paradoxical formulations to determine any overriding truths arising from its closure. This means an overwhelming act (a *truth act* as it were- an act such as the revolution) that could in effect intend to subsume the closure. pp.145, *Preamble, Theatre ecology: environments and performance events*, Cambridge University Press

‘freezing point is called the melting point’.⁵⁵ Women had more at stake in such dynamic moves than men, given the roles they were identified with. Mostly, women supported the revolutionaries by keeping house for them, spreading propaganda, collecting funds, hiding and transporting weapons and even making explosives. Reba Roychoudhury, a performer in the IPTA Central Squad, in her memoir *Jibaner Tane Shilper Tane* notes-

‘I have a story of Rangpur... Suddenly one day one comrade sent a message that I have to distribute some pamphlets in a cinema hall... But I was thinking how to distribute the pamphlets in the cinema hall? The cinema hall was very far from our house! Anyway before six in the evening I somehow managed to leave the house. I could not have taken anyone and nobody could be told about it. I was scared, if someone recognizes me! I never go out like this. Apart from going to the school. I had to leave at an hour when it was already getting dark, but it wasn’t night yet. Somehow I managed to enter the cinema hall. Now I was thinking how to distribute them, when to distribute them? If I am caught? If my father comes to know? I was thinking all this. I decided to take advantage of the interval. I sat somehow at a space on the balcony. The moment the bell rang for the interval I threw all the pamphlets from up the balcony to the rest of the hall. Then I immediately had to come out. Where did I have the time to see if the pamphlets fell at one area or they spread out?... Then the police started to look out everywhere for who had distributed the pamphlets... They understood that they were distributed from the balcony and definitely some girl must have done it.’⁵⁶

The events of the late twenty’s, early thirty’s brought women to the front of the dynamic- the revolutionary *Act*. Santi and Suniti, two schoolgirls from Comilla, shot Magistrate Stevens to death on 14th December 1931. Next year, Bina Das attempted to shoot the Governor of Bengal at the Calcutta University Convocation ceremonies. In September, the same year, Pritilata Wadedar, a Chittagong school teacher, led fifteen men in a raid on the Chittagong Club. The revolutionaries entered the club and began shooting injuring more than ten. The attackers fled as the light went off. During the escape Pritilata swallowed poison. She left a testament-

⁵⁵p.145, *ibid*

⁵⁶p.8, *Jibaner tane shilper tane*, Reba Roychoudhury, Thima, Kolkata, 1999

'I wonder why there should be any distinction between males and females in a fight for the cause of the country's freedom? ... If sisters can stand side by side with the brothers in a Satyagraha movement, why are they not so entitled in a revolutionary movement?' (As quoted by Forbes, p. 141) Her death came as a demand for equality of action. Many women during this period engaged into violent action and expected equal sentence. But the 'liberal democratic and gender sensitive' ethos of the colonial government reprimanded them with penalty that the women felt did not equate to their *Act* (Forbes). The colonized women, who, as has been argued by Anne McClintock to be doubly subjugated, firstly by the colonial power and then by the colonized men⁵⁷, needed to realize their potential as the colonized equal by similar punishment. Sartre recognized that power was a dialectical phenomenon, that torturer and tortured, racist and victim, colonizer and colonized, the empowered and disempowered, were locked in a symbiotic relation in which the first could not escape consequences of his relation with the second.⁵⁸ Violence within this apparatus functioned as a mode of realization or consciousness of one's position of being the subjugated, and therefore the *Act* became the first step towards the dislodging of this system. For women, participation in such an *Act* became imperative in view of their doubly repressed position in the society and the logic for that was being searched in a national historical linearity as Uma Chakravorty has also shown. In this context an IPTA CS song could be quoted-

'Jhansir rani Lakshmibai ar Chandbibi Sultana

Amar smaran tarao chilo ei bharoter lolona' (Spirit of India)⁵⁹

(The queen of Jhansi and the moon faced Princess Sultana/ I remember they were also the daughters of India)

In the next Chapter, I would also discuss how the *Act* of performance for a woman where such an *Act* is seen as morally, socially, legally unacceptable becomes a violent disposition within the existing socio-political apparatus.

⁵⁷In *Imperial Leather: race, gender, and sexuality in the colonial contest*, Anne McClintock, Routledge, 1995

⁵⁸p. xiii, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, Jean Paul Sartre, Routledge, London and New York, 2001

⁵⁹p.37, *Gananatya Katha*, Sajal Roychoudhury, Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1990

*Conversion(s)*⁶⁰: The need for uprooting the Colonial Government which was by now accepted as an illegitimate power found impetus in the *force* of a hope as has been argued earlier and was also motivated by experiences individual and collective. A huge section of the native population, both men and women, during the colonial period would migrate to England. As within the Colonial system, both the colonizer and the colonized shared an ontological ambivalence, which led to such traffic of people, knowledge and cultures from both sides although the degree or the appreciation of such traffic is loaded with a presupposed understanding of value. But nevertheless, the individual experience of International crisis, the power of Fascism, the formation of a socialist state, the World Wars, responses through cultural forms often led to socio-political *conversion(s)*. NK Krishnan in his autobiography *Testament of Faith... memoirs of a communist* writes, ‘The year 1935 was a momentous one in the history of Europe, indeed the history of the world. It certainly proved to be a momentous year for me, personally, for it was in the latter half of 1935 that the final break with my old life (he had actually come to give the ICS exams) and I joined the Communist Party at the age of twenty-two... The political atmosphere prevailing in England in 1935 precipitated the qualitative leap in my life into the communist party. Hitler had come to power in Germany in 1933. With the active assistance of the ruling classes of Britain, he had by 1935, stabilized the Nazi regime and set it on the high road to militarization and world war of domination. The Hitler-Mussolini-Tojo axis had been firmly established and each of the partners to this axis had already stated his aggressive war of conquest. A grandiose plan of world conquest extending over Europe, Asia and India had already been unfolded.’⁶¹ He worked with the Communist Party of Great Britain from 1935 onwards and during this period he met Parvati, later to become the manager of the IPTA Central Squad and his wife, who was also part of the student delegate who went to Paris in an International student conference. (Krishnan, p.56) Shanta Gandhi also went to England under the

⁶⁰ As has been explained in the *footnote 1*, the technologies of the self along with the technologies of domination create the subject. Such processes lead to *conversion(s)* – the conversion of the subject to himself/herself where the *self* is understood as a position, a horizon or a status.

⁶¹ p.46, *Testament of faith: memoirs of a communist*, NK Krishnan, New Delhi Publishing House, New Delhi 1990

pressure of her parents to study medicine there when she was 16/17. She recalls, 'And here I came in touch with these (Labour Party and Socialist Left inclined people who were for the freedom of India) and the students I met there. At that time Indian league with Krishna Menon there and Panditji (Jawaharlal Nehru?) who had come after sometime or he had just come after I reached. They had decided to send an Ambulance to Spain as part of the Spain Aid India Campaign... For that, funds were being collected. In those days there were very few Indians really, Indian girls who knew dancing well... So I went all over England. I got part in various plays, ballets and gave solo (she had come across the *Shantiniketan* style⁶² of dancing when in India)... But I did go round England with them, dancing and collecting funds and so on. So my parents came to know. Rather India office saw to it that my father was told that I was turning red. But I did not know in those days the difference between white and red or anything like that. I became politicized much after that when they started pestering my parents about it. So my father called me home for a holiday... He said, 'Look here there are other children in the house and this is an expensive proposition. If you are going to do these kind of things then you'd better come back but if you promise that you are not going to have anything to do with politics then you can complete your studies' I said I cannot promise at the moment at all so I'd better stay. So I stayed back. After doing my first year MD I stayed back and joined the Royal Institute of Science (Bombay) and I joined the student's movement. And there was no question of my training for a profession because by that time I had also started feeling that I might become a dancer. But there was no question because nobody would think about it at that point.'⁶³

One man who had literally changed the face of *contemporary dance* of the period and given new meaning to the dance of a *modern India* was Uday Shankar. During this period inspired by the classical dance forms of India, its paintings, histories, stories and fantasies around the colonial subcontinent and the middle-east, a new dance form which is the *oriental dance* had emerged which was made popular in Europe and America by people like Ruth Saint Dennis, Mata Hari, Anna Pavlova among others.

⁶² founded at Shantiniketan under the patronage of Rabindranath Tagore

⁶³ Shanta Gandhi in interview with Prathibha Aggarwal

Uday Shankar was a student of Sir J. J. School of Art in Bombay when his father Master Shyam Shankar who was living in London had asked him to 'proceed there forthwith'⁶⁴. He joined the Royal College of Art there. Shyam Shankar who would arrange variety shows in London 'purely as a diversion' would engage Uday in his presentations. He would occasionally dance and also contribute in magic shows. Anna Pavlova during this period had extensively travelled the 'orient'. 'She had visited India and had been anxious to see Indian dance but could find none, for the right people looked upon dancing as a frivolous and vulgar pursuit and would have nothing to do with it. However, Pavlova had visited temples and caves, and had seen some of the festivals and ceremonies. She was fired with the desire to offer some dances or ballets on Indian themes.' (Khokar, p.27) It was with the help of some friends that she met Uday. Later they together presented *A Hindu Wedding, Krishna and Radha* and similar dances on oriental themes. It was Pavlova who apparently told Uday, 'You should go to India and bring something to show us. There are such wonders in your country...' (Khokar, p.36) This was as the myth goes, an 'eye opener' for Uday. It is well known that later he mastered the oriental dance form which he had been introduced to by his stay in England and France and by Anna Pavlova, but he also made additions of improvised movements which were inspired mainly by his training in the visual arts. Later Uday Shankar, with the financial support of some friends, independent sponsors⁶⁵ and the money he collected from performances world over that he founded the *Uday Shankar India Culture Centre* at Almora modeled on the Dartington Hall which started functioning from March 3, 1940. Uday Shankar appointed stalwarts of the dance forms like Kathakali, Bharata Natyam, Manipuri and also of music in his centre. Rabindranath Tagore was also striving to do the same in Shantiniketan. According to Sudhi Pradhan, the other set of influences and experiences in the work of Uday Shankar came from 'floating news' of 'his Bengal's dying people'. He collected money for the Bengal Famine through his performances at Delhi. Influenced by the socialist maxim that had given rise to socialist realism in Russia, Brechtian alienation techniques and other modernist cultural movements in

⁶⁴p.22, *His dance, his life: A portrait of Uday Shankar*, Mohan Khokar, Himalayan Books, New Delhi, 1983

⁶⁵That included Alice Boner, Michael Chekhov, Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Elmhirst, John Martin, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sir. Ferozkhan Noon, Sir Chinubhai Madhavlal Ranchhodlal, Romain Rolland, Sir William Rothenstein, Leopold Stokowski, Mr Whitney and Lady Daphne Straight and Rabindranath Tagore

Europe like German Expressionism (the influence of which becomes apparent in his film *Kalpana*), whose experiences he had gathered during the extensive tours in Europe, he had earlier created the ballet 'Labour and machinery'. In Delhi in one of his performances through a symbolic use of the sickle he tried to portray that the socio-economic problem in India was essentially that linked to the peasant and farmers. 'Janajuddho' the mouthpiece of the CPI on 23rd November 1943 reports, 'the world famous dancer Uday Shankar is going to Bombay along with his troupe. His manager has informed the leadership of Bombay IPTA that he is going to present his dance in front of the working class with nominal charges of tickets. Most of the money collected from the ticket sale will be given to the IPTA – the IPTA will spend this money on the victims of the Bengal famine. This programme of dance and music will be held on the Parel ground of Bombay for the working class movement there and it is expected that fifty thousand workers would experience the representation of their hopes and desires through the presentations of the world famous artist. We hope that the efforts of a world class artist like Uday Shankar would inspire other artists.' Such presentations also brought him criticisms such as – Uday Shankar has left 'throne of the pure golden art' and has become a socio-political 'propagandist'⁶⁶.

Such efforts of portraying 'one's own *people*' through cultural forms like the literature and theatre could be seen even before the formation of the IPTA in 1943. In fact, collective *conversion(s)* often led to formation of cultural organizations whose vision was a new culture for a new nation- India. Ali Sardar Jafri recalls the *Progressive Writers Association* (PWA) movement which took inspiration from 'Iqbal's tremendous line – *Uttho Meri Duniya ke Garibon ko jagado* (Arise and wake the poor of my world)', had a 'wide spectrum' - 'Sajjad Zaheer was a Communist, Prem Chand was a Gandhian. But the common rallying point was the freedom movement'.⁶⁷ PWA was founded in November 1935 in London 'when after the disillusionment and disintegration of years of suffering in India and conscious of the destruction of most of our values through the capitalist crisis of 1931, a few of us emerged from the slough of despond of the cafes and garrets of Bloomsbury and

⁶⁶ 'Gananatya sangho o Uday Shankar', Sudhi Pradhan, Gananatya, October 1977

⁶⁷ In interview with Iqbal Masud, Indian Express, Bombay, 6 June 1992

formed the nucleus of the Indian Progressive Writer's Association'⁶⁸, although the first meeting was held in Lucknow, India, in April 1936. Writers in different parts of the world like in Paris, London, Brussels and Madrid, during this period were getting together to assert their view about fascism and war. In their 1935 meet at Paris were present Gorky, André Gide, Romain Rolland, EM Foster, and André Malraux among others. From this meet of the writers arose the need to form branches in different parts of the world. In 1936, in the second meet of the *International Writers' Congress*, Mulk Raj Anand was the representative from India.⁶⁹ Under similar circumstances was formed the Youth Cultural Institute in Calcutta. Initially some students of the Calcutta University, at the end of 1939, planned to organize a research group for research and popularizing various socio-economic and political problems of different countries. When this could not materialize, among the group some students on their own accord wrote and staged dramas in English especially for performance before the members of the Calcutta University Rowing Club. Inspired by the popularity of their work they contemplated a permanent cultural movement in the lines of the PWA. PWA along with the YCI became the forerunner of the IPTA movement.

Although it was often considered that the inception of Indian Communism was a foreign conspiracy organized by Moscow, (Sarkar, p.247) nevertheless, it could be seen as a result of similar *conversion(s)*. The founder of the Communist Party in India, Naren Bhattacharji (alias Manabendra Nath Roy or MN Roy) had come in contact with the Bolshevik Mikhail Borodin when he was in Mexico in 1919 and was helping found the Communist Party in Mexico! In 1920, in the second Congress of the Communist International (Comintern). he met Lenin and got into a controversy regarding the role of the Communists in the Colonial World. According to Lenin, 'The colonial bourgeoisie competed with the imperialist bourgeois class in terms of control over the colonial market, control over resources and liberalization of the legal and juridical context for the economic activity of imperialist interests. As the indigenous bourgeoisie could not escape these conditions of its economic existence, it was likely, thought Lenin, that political organizations which would represent their interests would

⁶⁸ *On the Progressive Writer's Movement*, Mulk Raj Anand, Marxist Cultural Movement in India, ed. Sudhi Pradhan

⁶⁹ *Bharater Marxbadi Sanskriti Andolaner Prothom Joog*, Sudhi Pradhan, Gananatya, Dec 1989

periodically press for an intensification of nationalist struggle; but once concessions were extracted, put brakes on militancy. Dualism, therefore, meant a patterned behavior, which was not contradictory in the sense of being merely disorderly or without rational design. It indicated a deliberate strategic oscillation between a politics of confrontation and a politics of compromise.⁷⁰... (M.N.)Roy's understanding of dualism was wholly different. For him, it meant an application of the model that Marx had applied to the European bourgeois classes. The historical career of the bourgeoisie will show a progressive phase, though marred by compromises; but it will eventually arrive at a final political crisis in which the bourgeoisie would betray the national movement. Dualism simply referred to the existence of these two stages in the political biography of the bourgeois class. Nevertheless, despite certain differences with Lenin, the Comintern admitted Roy's intellectual eminence and he was entrusted with the leadership of the communist movement in India.'(Kaviraj, pp.220-221) In October 1920, MN Roy, Abani Mukherji and some *muhajirs* (Khilafat enthusiasts who later had crossed over through Afghanistan into Soviet territory) like Mohammad Ali and Mohammad Shafiq founded a Communist Party of India in Tashkent! Its headquarters was shifted to Berlin in 1922 when hopes of penetrating India had faded. There the fortnightly *Vanguard of Indian Independence* and *India in Transition* (in collaboration with Abani Mukherji) were published. Several other groups during this period were turning to Marxism like the old Berlin group headed by Virendranath Chattopadhyay, Bhupendranath Dutt and Barkatullah who founded the India Independence Party in Berlin. Under Rattan Singh, Santokh Singh and Teja Singh Swatantra, a section of the Ghadr movement who were in exile also turned to Communism. A large section who had become disillusioned by the Non-cooperation movement and Khilafat movement like SA Dange in Bombay, Muzaffar Ahmad in Calcutta, Singaravelu in Madras, Ghulam Hussain in Lahore had started to give shape to Communist Groups. By the end of 1922, through emissaries like Nalini Gupta Shaukat Usmani, MN Roy started to establish secret link with these groups.(Sarkar, pp.247-248)

⁷⁰ *Comintern and the National and the Colonial Questions* as quoted by Sudipta Kaviraj in *The Heteronomous Radicalism of M.N. Roy in Political Thought in Modern India*; ed. Thomas Pantham and Kenneth L. Deutsch; Sage Publications, New Delhi; 1986

VI

Death as representation:

Throughout this work, the theoretical tool for understanding the emergence of a modern free state i.e. India, has been the *political theory of representation* and furthermore representation in the various cultural forms especially those forms used by the IPTA (which would be discussed in detail later). But one theoretical difficulty that this work faced was in understanding *non-representability*.⁷¹ It has often been widely considered that something as gruesome as the holocaust- the extermination of the Jews in the Nazi camps is beyond representation. Quoting *witnesses*⁷² of the holocaust in the preface to his book *Remnants of Auschwitz: The witness and the Archive*, Giorgio Agamben writes, 'On the one hand, what happened in the camps appears to the survivors as the only true thing and, as such, absolutely unforgettable; on the other hand, this truth is to the same degree unimaginable, that is, irreducible to the real elements that constitute it.(Agamben, p.12) For Agamben the survivor becomes a *witness*, but his act is completed by the one who can never bear witness- the *Muselmann*⁷³. But what if the survivor does not exist, not only by *being dead* but also by not existing as subjects who were already visible before death to be able to bear witness to any experience! Here, what I am referring to are those who remain in an abyss and have not yet been represented *fully* to be able to exist. In the *new society* under the British colonial rule, many were such non-existent entities who belonged to this abyss⁷⁴. Although once in a while, they appeared in revolt when colonial

⁷¹According to the French philosopher Alain Badiou, sees this as 'conceit'. In 'Manifesto for Philosophy' talking about the impossibility to think or the 'unthinkability' of Auschwitz he writes, 'For conceit turns into a dangerous deficiency when our philosophers, from the axiom putting the accusation of the crimes of the century at philosophy's door, draw the joint conclusions of philosophy's impasse and the unthinkable nature of the crime' (p.30, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, Alain Badiou, State University of New York Press, 1992)

⁷² the sense of the word 'witness' has been discussed earlier in the *Introduction*

⁷³ Death camp slang word for prisoners on the edge of death...

⁷⁴Here I refer to the *poor* (mostly peasants) who were mostly the victims of the Bengal Famine irrespective of the community/tribe they belonged to. In context of discussing the *poor's* 'worthiness' to get microcredit and their disappearance from the cityscape in the light of the Commonwealth Games 2010 to be held at New Delhi, Soumyabrata Choudhury in his paper '*Political Sociability and theatre in the subcontinent: The poverty of appearance, appearance of poverty...*', argues that, 'The poor are excluded... from the space of appearance which is the city... and in the same move , are exposed to

intervention as well as interventions of the new society disrupted their location (See Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947* for a detailed study) but these revolts were often curtailed and found irrelevant for a *history* of the new India. Although Gandhi's efforts to mobilize this section especially during the Civil Disobedience Movement was to some extent successful in making them appear but it was the Bengal Famine of 1942-43⁷⁵, that struck the *new people* of this *new society* with shame and anger and a force to deracinate the Colonial rule, which it found responsible to compel this invisible lot to appear in death- disrespecting the rules of *la demeure*⁷⁶ – rules that the 'Protestant, commercial, maritime and free' British Imperialists had slowly infused in the name of a modern liberal government. The horror of death in the streets of Calcutta forced the *new people* to *Act* demanding a *right to live* and retreat of the colonial government which could let this happen. Therefore, unlike the holocaust, any representation of which is considered to be an incomplete *Act* – and therefore not morally permissible, as what happened to the Jews in the camps was considered to be beyond any *human act*, - the Bengal Famine which resulted in the death of millions had to be represented in order to unveil the inhuman act of the colonial government which failed to treat its colonial subject in par with its subject in England. Thus during this period we find several cultural forms depicting the gruesome deaths in a way that made the horror look REAL. Sunil Jana's⁷⁷ photographs of the corpses being sniffed

this very appearance and its norm. Replicating in a fundamental way the structural complicity and the point of application of sovereign power Giorgio Agamben calls 'bare life', this 'exposed exclusion' or this 'non-manifest exposure' reveals pre-subjective threshold where the thought of 'the poor' struggles to create its element, a threshold before the thesis on exclusion defended by Amartya Sen based on the normatively determined subjective parameter of a public emotion (shame) inherited from Adam Smith.' Moving forward from this argument, here I am looking at *death* as it makes appear 'bare life' in the city- which was Calcutta during the Bengal Famine.

⁷⁵In the terrible summer and autumn of 1943, lakhs trekked to Calcutta to starve to death on its streets, begging no longer for rice, but just for the water in which it had been cooked. Between one and a half to three million perished in Bengal in a basically man made famine. As starvation and malnutrition led to major epidemics of malaria, cholera, and small pox, Bengal returned mortality figures considerably higher than normal for years after 1943...' (Sumit Sarkar,p 406)

⁷⁶*La Demeure*, Jacques Derrida explains is the *abode*. Referring to the allusion or insinuation to a distinction between the fiction and the autobiography – that remains undecidable and in whose indecidability it becomes impossible to stand stable – Derrida thus comes to the conclusion 'One thus finds oneself in a fatal and double impossibility: the impossibility of deciding, but the impossibility of remaining (*demeurer*) in the undecidable'. Thus *la demeure* becomes *the abode* which is necessary and at the same time holds the impossibility of *abidance* (*demeurance*). (*Demeure: Fiction and testimony*, Jacques Derrida, Stanford University Press, 2000)

⁷⁷ Worked for People's War and People's Age- the organ of the Communist Party of India

and eaten by dogs, piled on the banks of ponds, lying in the fields brought this reality to the *people*, an instance of which one could experience at Wellington Square in Calcutta. Sunil Munshi recalls⁷⁸ ‘American and English soldiers did not dare to enter here’ which ‘was the limit’ of their exploit. Zainul Abedin’s, Somnath Hore’s, Chittaprasad’s paintings similarly visually told stories of death⁷⁹.

These are some of the sketches by Zainul Abedin on the famine published along with an article on Abedin by Chittaprasad in People’s War, Jan 21, 1945



⁷⁸ In an interview taken by me in 14th August 2009 at Kolkata

⁷⁹ In February 1944, the Calcutta Karukala Sangh organized an exhibition of Representations of the Destitutes. This included works by Adinath Mukhopadhyay, Indu Gupta, Bimal Majumdar, Shaila Chakraborty, Anil Mukhopadhyay and woodcut by Ramendranath Chakraborty. Similarly many other visual artists, writers represented them in their work. For a detailed study see *A Matter of Conscience: Artists bear witness to The Great Bengal Famine of 1943*, Nikhil Sarkar, trans. Satyabrata Dutta, Punascha, Calcutta, 2003

Below is a sketch of famished women by Chittaprasad which was published along with his article on famine called 'Eastern Pakistan' in *People's War*, Sept 17, 1944



Rekha Jain, an IPTA Central Squad performer recalls her experience during this period and how she joined the cultural movement in order to mobilize people and collect funds for famine relief, 'When in 1943 we reached there (Calcutta), the whole of Bengal was in the clasp of the famine. Beggars (who were essentially farmers) would come out from here and there, and their voices saying 'phen dao, mago phen dao' (give us some water in which rice has been boiled) would resonate from all directions. One in hunger would take one's last breath on the platform of the streets. A strange smell would float in the air making one anxious. The experiences that many have had with those who were famine stricken were even more heart rending. During this time when the intellectuals of the FSU (Friends of Soviet Union) would meet at the office, their main concern would be how to give some relief to the famine stricken. What programme could be adopted such that enough funds could be collected. I met a lot of writers, singers, actors to discuss this crisis... Benoy Roy (later to join IPTA Central Squad), Jyotirendra Moitra wrote many songs on this occasion and these songs were composed and a group was formed which would sing these songs of the famine. Nemi (Nemi Chandra Jain, husband of Rekha Jain) and I were included in this group. When this group would move across various localities singing these songs, I saw men and women would collect to listen to our songs in the streets, in the galleries of their houses and throw bundles of rice, pulses, money in our *jhola* (bags for money collection). It was during this time that some friends prepared a

dance called 'Bhukha Bangal' (Hungry Bengal) and a play in Bengali called 'Jaban Bandi'. This dance and drama used to affect the audience so deeply that they would contribute very generously. A lot of money was collected. In view of the dreadfulness of the famine, this feeling was not enough, therefore from the experience of these performances it was decided that such performances should be organized even outside Calcutta, so that the people of other regions also have some impression of the destruction of the Bengal famine and thus money could be collected.'⁸⁰ It was in view of the success of 'Bhukha Bangal' and 'Jaban Bandi' which was translated to hindi and named 'Antim abhilasha'(there are anecdotes which say these performances collected more than 1 lakh rupees only from Punjab during this time) and the performances of the Bengal Squad invited to Bombay in mid-1944 to collect money for famine relief⁸¹ that P C Joshi, the general secretary of the Communist Party of India (CPI) during this period, decided to initiate a cultural process that would mobilize political action of the masses. Sunil Munshi who was then a member of the All India Student's Federation, a student's wing of the CPI remembers, 'A meeting was called at the Red Flag hall⁸², we went to the AISF (All India Student's Federation) working committee (meeting). In the AISF working committee Joshi told us, 'you all come in the evening, just come and watch what we are doing for you, you must learn from what you see and participate in this movement'. So we went to the Red Flag hall. The team was getting ready at the Red Flag Hall, which later came to Bengal as the IPTA squad. He said what you could not do, they will. They will collect money, inspire people, they will involve them in anti-famine relief work. If you can do nothing more, do this much, which is to collect audience for them, so that they can perform well, that they can go everywhere - arrange for that. This is your duty for the Party.' (S Munshi in interview with me)

Although *death* gave form to the section that had till now belonged to an abyss and then on being represented by cultural forms mobilized public action and participation in anti-colonial movement, in an outstanding way, but what was beyond any comprehensibility was the exploitation of women and questions that raised concerns

⁸⁰Pp.1-2, *Nemiji ke sath mera natyanubhav*, Rekha Jain, Rangkarm 2006- the annual magazine of IPTA Raigarh,2006 (translation from hindi is mine)

⁸¹p. 63, *A dedicated and creative life* by PC Joshi, in Balraj Sahni- an intimate portrait; ed. PC Joshi, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. 1974

⁸² At Bombay

regarding sexual and gender morality during this period of death and hunger. Ali Sardar Jafri who was sent to Cox's Bazar at Chittagong, an area affected by famine along with the editor of People's War wrote in the article- 'In Cox's Bazar (Chittagong) -Men become profiteers -Women prostitutes -Children pimp'⁸³-

'The contractors wanted women for the military⁸⁴ and women wanted cash for food. The Mog women were more in demand, because they were healthier and prettier than the still poorer Bengalis whose frail bodies had been sapped by hunger during the famine and the epidemics thereafter...In the beginning, however the Mog women had fought to preserve their chastity...Mog women had fought to preserve their chastity... Mog women ran with open knives behind the soldiers who dared to insult them. But ultimately they gave way.' Sunil Janah the photographer who went to Chittagong with Kalpana Joshi two years after the area was hit by the famine wrote-

'In Chittagong town, Kalpanadi led me through the winding disorderly streets into the fishermen's slums...From the women who crowded round her it was difficult to single out the two faces which still had any dignity left in them...What had happened to the fisherwomen had happened to the village poor everywhere – to the artisans, the peasants, the destitute hordes left by the famine. In the destitute home in Chittagong there were representatives of them all. They were labour corps women living promiscuously with all sorts of people, sharing the large sprawling shacks erected for them...Here the women looked sordid and evoked more disgust than pity. From this place to the town was only one step and it looked as though it was not even that and most of the women did not need to take that step.' (People's War, June 10, 1945)

Stories of mother's snatching food from their children were well known myths of this period. But such visual and narrative tales, newspaper reportings also unsettled the notion of gender and sexual morality that had stemmed from the idea of a *new modern public*. The biopolitical imagery received a huge blow under such circumstances. Life, care, community, nation everything became muted in front of *Death*. In such a state of utter confusion, as reflex, many men and also women started a battle against *Death*. In the name of bare life during this period women in huge numbers started to participate in relief work. Although there was enough ambivalence regarding their participation

⁸³ People's War, July 1, 1945

⁸⁴ American soldiers who were posted at Chittagong during the World War II

during the initial days, especially criticism from men, but the face of death, made these criticisms faint. Reñu Chakraborty recalls this period when she was an activist in the *Mahila Atma Rokha Samiti*⁸⁵ (MARS) in *Communists in Indian Women's Movement 1940-1950*. She writes, 'From September 1942 onwards communist women started working in the bustees (slums) of Calcutta and among the rural poor. In Calcutta, Pabna, Rangpur, Barisal, Dinajpur districts, women were the first to start famine relief work. As long queues formed in front of the food control shops the traders manhandled them and misbehaved with them... Women volunteers came forward to help to see that women were served properly under prevailing circumstances. Even bustee women joined in this work. Those who even four months ago would not come out of 'purdah' (veil) – Hindu and Muslim women – worked as volunteers. Middle-class housewives were seen from early morning, leaving their domestic chores and working in the queues.' (Chakravorty, p.29) Preeti Banerjee⁸⁶, Manikuntala Sen⁸⁷ remembers how when they had to leave home for such work, often there would be rumours about their having eloped with some man, but the women of their village or their mothers would speak in their defence.

Although one could not entirely dismiss the symbolic representation of the women and their relegation to certain accepted roles but struggle at the level of *bare life* made many women *revolutionaries* – political as also socio-cultural.

The Commune

The Communist Party of India (CPI) had its headquarters at Bombay which was also known as the PHQ or the Party Headquarters. PC Joshi narrates the eve of Balraj Sahni and his wife Damyanti's⁸⁸ joining the CPI, 'We decided to celebrate the occasion and all of us went to Mai's⁸⁹ room who acted the real mother to us all in the PHQ (party

⁸⁵ Committee for Women's self defense

⁸⁶ In the interview with me

⁸⁷ In her autobiography '*Sediner Kotha*', Nabapatra Prokashan, Kolkata, 2003

⁸⁸ Balraj Sahni joined the Bombay IPTA, Damyanti his wife was an actress with the Prithvi theatre of the Pritviraj Kapoor fame, later both Balraj and Damyanti joined Bombay film industry

⁸⁹ *Mai* was the mother in law of the party member ASR Chari, who was also a trained nurse. She was in charge of the commune at Raj Bhawan assisted by the family cook of Chari family Ganu.

headquarters), which we ran on a commune basis, a *Gandhian ashram with pluses*⁹⁰, according to our principles' (Joshi, p. 59) A commune, which Rajni Palme Dutt, leader of the British Communist Party during this period, criticized as 'primitive' mode of living⁹¹, was set up for the party members at Raj Bhawan in Bombay, renting two floors following the direction of the party general secretary PC Joshi. NK Krishnan writes- 'On the first floor were the offices of the members of the polit bureau, PC Joshi, G Adhikari and BT Ranadive, offices of the party secretarial staff and the typists' section as well as the editorial offices of the Party organ, People's War which was being published in the five languages, English, Hindi, Urdu, Marathi and Gujarati. On this floor was also housed the library and the press cuttings section. The second floor housed the common kitchen and dining hall, the common room for reading newspapers, lounging and gossiping, and residential rooms including a room each for four families, and last but not least the dark room of that talented photographer of the party, Sunil Janah.' A second smaller building in Khetwadi Main Road in Bombay was set up where some party members were given accommodation. Between 1942- 47, sixty members were staying there 'speaking different languages, working tirelessly and with a great spirit of comradeship'. (Krishnan, p.128-29) After the formation of the IPTA Central Cultural Troupe or Squad, a similar commune in a similar '*Gandhian ashram with pluses*' was set up at Andheri. According to Dina Gandhi, the bungalow at Andheri 'surrounded by gardens' in Bombay in which the troupe lived and where the commune functioned was given⁹² to the Central Squad by the uncle of Gul Bardhan who was a sympathizer of the party – 'As soon as you entered the premises, you were in a big field and adjoining that there was a lawn as well as a swing' writes Rekha Jain⁹³. Among the female members of the squad in the first year of its functioning were the two sisters Dina (Gandhi) Sanghvi who later became Dina Pathak (1923- 2002), Shanta Gandhi (1917- 2002,

⁹⁰ Italics are mine

⁹¹ Ram Rehman quotes the incident from Sunil Janah's unpublished autobiography in the 14th PC Joshi Memorial Lecture delivered by him on '*Sunil Janah, Photographer and PC Joshi: the Making of a Progressive Culture*' in 2010

⁹² Rented according to Rekha Jain, Shantida – my mentor, Rekha Jain, Rhythm Incarnate: Tribute to Shanti Bardhan, ed. Gul Bardhan,

⁹³ p.60, *ibid*

married to Victor Kiernein for sometime) from Gujarat and associated with the student movement followed by the cultural movement in Bombay, she was also at the Almora Centre for sometime⁹⁴; Gul (Zaveri) Bardhan (1928-) who was also a Gujarati, born and brought up in Bombay and later joined the student's movement in Bombay and was about to join Uday Shankar's centre at Almora when it closed; Reba (Roy) Roychoudhury (1925- ?) who was part of the student movement as also the MARS at Rangpur (now in Bangladesh) and had later joined the Bengal Squad, she was also the sister of Benoy Roy of the Central troupe – about her the first souvenir of the CS said 'She is an accomplished singer, but now does more of dancing'; Preeti (Sarkar) Banerjee (1922-) who was a student activist at Rajshahi (now in Bangladesh) and later joined MARS there and she was also the cousin of Reba and Benoy Roy; Rekha Jain (1924-2010) was the wife of the party member Nemi Chandra Jain and she had also participated in the cultural squad at Bengal. Leila Sayyad (?-1988), married to P. Sundarraiya and later came to be known as Leela Sundaraiyya) was a bank accountant, associated with the Congress and later Bombay cultural squad, Kisan sabha⁹⁵ and the women's movement; and Ruby (Gauri according to brochure) Dutt (1935⁹⁶-) who is the sister of the famous Kalpana Dutt of the Chittagong armoury raid and sister in law of PC Joshi later married to PC Joshi (junior) -the economist. Parvati Krishnan (1919- ?) who was a party member, secretary of PC Joshi was the manager of the troupe who lived in the PHQ with her husband NK Krishnan and child⁹⁷. She was also the announcer for their programmes and was especially well-known for commentaries in English. Although the name of Usha Dutt was included in the first brochure of the programme of the IPTA Central Squad (CS from now) but she had not performed and was later removed from CS⁹⁸. Among the male members of the troupe were Shantikumar Bardhan who 'was one of the dance tutors

⁹⁴ Interview with Pratibha Aggarwal on 28th August 1984

⁹⁵ The farmer's movement

⁹⁶ Although this is the recorded year but her original date of birth according to her husband PC Joshi (junior) was around 1930-31

⁹⁷ Parvathi Krishnan in interview with M. ALLIRAJAN and SUBHA J RAO, *The Hindu*, January 13, 2003

⁹⁸ Apparently although PC Joshi had asked her to join CS, she was removed by Benoy Roy, p. 64, Usha Dutt, *Ora, amra, era*, Sova Sen

at Uday Shankar's Cultural Centre at Almora. Feeling that dancing to be vital must go to the people, he joined the Indian People's Theatre Association last year (1944), and became the Director of the newly formed Squad.'⁹⁹ Abani Das Gupta 'was a leading musician in Uday Shankar's Cultural Centre. He also joined the Indian People's Theatre Association at the same time as Shantikumar and is the Music Director of the Squad'. (1st Souvenir of CS). Sachin Sankar 'is a cousin of Uday Shankar. He came to Bombay to join a film company, but on seeing the work of the squad he felt that his place was with them. He helps Shantikumar and also dances in many items.'(ibid) Benoy Roy 'comes from Bengal. He was a Trade Union worker who took to composing songs for the people on the struggle for liberation. He was a leader of the Bengal IPTA squad which toured Punjab, Maharastra and Gujarat and raised two lakhs for the People's Relief Committee. He now composes some of the songs and also sings and dances.'(ibid) Dashrathlal 'from Bihar was a Tramway worker and is a well known figure in the Trade Union Movement in Calcutta. He was also a member of the Bengal Squad led by Benoy Roy. He now composes songs for the squad.'(ibid) Nagesh 'comes from Karnatak. For many years a political worker in Bombay, he worked in the Bombay IPTA from the times of its formation. He does both dancing and singing.'(ibid) Appuni 'is a peasant boy from Malabar. He worked in the Kisan movement and joined the squad to serve those very kisans with whom he had worked.'(ibid) Prem Dhawan 'is from the Punjab where he has worked in the student movement. He has a deep knowledge of Punjab folk melodies and composes many of the hindi songs that you will hear.'(ibid) Sushil Das Gupta 'is the brother of Abani and joined the squad very recently. He is one of the musicians.'(ibid) KM Reddy 'comes from Andhra. His love for music was aroused when he was studying at Santiniketan. He intended to be a journalist, but decided finally that the best way to serve the people was by joining the IPTA and making use of his magnificent voice.'(ibid)

The second souvenir of the CS has the addition of Ravi Shankar about whom the souvenir says 'One of the foremost of the younger musicians in our country today. He had his training under Ustad Allauddin Khan and was for many years with Uday

⁹⁹ First souvenir of the CS, p.380, Marxist Cultural Movement in India, Vol. I, ed. Sudhi Pradhan,

Shankar's troupe. He joined the Central troupe in August last year (1945-?)¹⁰⁰ and is now the music director of the troupe.' The others whose names were not in the first souvenir were Nemichand Jain – 'a young Hindi writer who joined the troupe recently and works with the music section and also composes songs', 'Narendra Sharma from the United Province, like Sachin, has come to us from Almorah. He also assists Shanti Kumar in his work.' 'Gangadharan is from Malabar and has had some year's training at the Kalamandalam started by the poet Vallathol. He is a recent addition to the troupe and belongs to the dance group', Hasan¹⁰¹ 'comes from Gujarat. He is part of the dance group and also responsible for stitching all costumes and curtains', 'Guniyal Javeri is from Gujarat and has been in the IPTA movement for the last two years', 'Bahadur Hussain is a nephew of Ustad Allauddin Khan. Plays sarod under training of Ravi Shankar.', 'Noda Chand (or Nader Chand) is from Calcutta. Recently joined, plays several instruments', 'Vasu Deo Bhalaban, Marathi boy from Bombay recently joined music group,' 'Debanshu Mukherjee, a student of Vishnudev Chatterjee from Calcutta. Recently joined the music section.'¹⁰²

Many of the members lived with their families, for example Abani Das Gupta lived with his wife who was in charge of the kitchen of the commune and their daughter called Silu, Rekha Jain with her husband Nemi Jain and daughter Reshmi (who was later sent back, as it was being difficult for Rekha Jain to work with her being around¹⁰³). Later when Ravi Shankar joined the troupe, he lived with his wife Annapurna, daughter of Ustad Allauddin Khan and son Shubho. The families had separate rooms for themselves, whereas the women stayed in one room and the men in other shared rooms.

At the commune, life was much disciplined and entirely devoted to the work of the troupe. Gul Bardhan remembers- 'Our first class would begin at seven o'clock in the morning. We would exercise till nine o'clock and then break for one hour for breakfast and cleaning the house. From ten to one we would again practice till lunch

¹⁰⁰ According to a report by Balraj Sahni in *People's Age* published on 13th Jan, 1946, it is 1946

¹⁰¹ 'Kathiawari Muslim youth, who was working as a tailor's apprentice before the IPTA noticed his talents and took him in' - *ibid*

¹⁰² p. 389, *Marxist cultural movement in India, Vol I*

¹⁰³ in interview with Pratibha Agarwal

break. In the afternoon from four o'clock, after tea, we learnt new movements and practiced compositions. We would break for tea again at six for half an hour and then continue till nine or ten at night. In a sense our routine was fixed by the kitchen bell.¹⁰⁴ Preeti Banerjee notes that the ones who were in the music group would get up a little earlier for regular *riyaz* (rehearsal) – 'the moonlight would still be there when I would wake up... Reddy... Ravishankar... his wife (Annapurna)... Sushil would sit on the swing and do the *riyaz* of his flute.'¹⁰⁵ The members would often sit back, after the rehearsals were over at night, to help making the costumes and other accessories necessary for the performances. Balraj Sahani writes- 'Typical of the spirit of bold experiment which characterizes the IPTA are the costumes. As the curtain went up on the dress rehearsal I was struck by their glamour. The patterns are entirely new and the colours extraordinarily pleasing. It took Chittoprasad (the artist whom all readers of People's Age know quite well already) two months to design them. Incredible as it may sound these costumes are mostly made of gunny cloth...The IPTA has neither the means nor the desire to go to the blackmarket for silks'¹⁰⁶; although according to Preeti Banerjee not only gunny cloth but other materials were also used. After lunch during the break period women would help in kitchen work.(Preeti Banerjee) Holidays were very rare during their stay at the commune and especially during the period when a 'show' was to be held soon, the performers would hardly get time to breathe. Even then Gul Bardhan writes 'once in a while we would get a holiday and I would run to Bombay to see three films one after another in the four-anna section. And at twelve o'clock at night I would stealthily climb a tree and enter the bungalow. Abani-da used to visit us around ten o'clock to see whether the whole group was in bed or not. So I used to arrange the bed beforehand in such a way that it looked as if someone was sleeping in it... Other members would go and spend their five rupees (the monthly allowance was 40 rupees according to most of the members of which one had to pay for food separately) on a good meal.'¹⁰⁷ Although Dina Pathak in her interview with Sova Sen notes that the quality of food provided at the commune was very good but Preeti Banerjee notes

¹⁰⁴ p.40, What a tremendous movement it was..., Gul Bardhan, Seagull Theatre Quarterly, Issue 7, October 1995

¹⁰⁵ In interview with me on 4th May 2010 at Kolkata

¹⁰⁶ IPTA Central Dance Troupe's Programme and Tour, Balraj Sahni, People's Age, Sunday, Jan 13, 1946

¹⁰⁷ p.41, *What a tremendous movement it was...*; Gul Bardhan

otherwise. It is possible that many members would prefer to go out for meals on holidays for that reason (PC Joshi of the PHQ notes the same).

There is a persistent uncertainty in the accounts of the IPTA members of the CS on whether the IPTA was a cultural wing of the Communist Party or not, and the members of the CS also members of the Communist Party or not. Talking about the Bombay IPTA with which Dina Pathak was associated for long, she says,

Pratibha Agarwal: Aur Communist Party ki policy...

Dina Pathak: Mulk Raj ji, Abbas and Chetan, were not members of the Communist Party. Their relation to it was that they wanted this kind of culture. Probably they liked the revolutionary spirit of the culture. The anti-british feeling that we had gave rise to this revolutionary spirit. Nevertheless, when the Communist Party would do its own plays, it would do plays in typical communist way although we would also participate in it.'

PC Joshi recalls, 'The Andheri Centre of the IPTA had become the rendezvous of celebrities from the cultural world. Among the regular visitors were Pritvi Raj Kapoor, Amiya Chakravarty of the Bombay Talkies, SD Burman, the famous music director who pioneered the popularization of folk songs in Calcutta, and Anil Biswas, the music director and producer...'¹⁰⁸

Therefore, the participation of many with the IPTA and its CS was not due to their affiliation to the Communist Party of India but due to the 'revolutionary spirit' that it carried forward. But this 'revolutionary spirit' would be maintained through the content of the performances which were decided in consultation with the general secretary of the CPI, PC Joshi himself, and by having regular party classes at the squad or inviting the members for important meetings of the party¹⁰⁹. Dina Gandhi remembers-'Parvati Krishnan was the manager or in charge of the troupe... we would have regular party classes taken by PC Joshi, Parvati Krishnan, KA Abbas¹¹⁰ and Ali

¹⁰⁸ p.68, *A dedicated and creative life* by PC Joshi

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ There is a variation in Dina Pathak's own accounts- in one Abbas was not a party member, in the other he would take party classes – could one not belonging to the party take party classes?!

Sardar Jafri'¹¹¹ But not everyone was uncritical of the party classes. Ravi Shankar writes- 'Those days I don't know why the members of the squad would be very harsh while talking about Nehru... Then one day I remember Rajni Palme Dutt came to speak in one of the meetings. That day I had some work for a film that I was doing. I could not be there for the speech. But when I came back I heard everything. He came and said you are making a mistake. You are not understanding what Nehru is trying to do... and similar other things he said. He actually praised Nehru a lot in the meeting. When I returned in the evening I heard a different tune from everyone. Everyone had suddenly got used to praising Nehru. I am saying this because I would find the vacillation of their love for things very strange.'¹¹²

But nevertheless, life at the commune was very different from the kind of life most of the members of the CS had earlier. For many it was an experience of a lifetime. Especially in the accounts of the women those 2-3 years that they had spent in the commune changed everything for them or had a possibility of a revolution – a socio-cultural one. Their lifestyle was often criticized by many, to the extent that Gandhi's paper *Harijan* had criticized it for immoral activities.¹¹³ When the troupe had gone to Meerut to perform, although they were looked after by a landlord at whose house they were staying, but the women of the house were not allowed to interact with the women of the troupe.¹¹⁴ However, the men and women who had collected at the commune, with a pay that was not sufficient, with a lifestyle that was difficult, food that was not good enough and party classes that aimed at a *conversion* of the very *being* of the members, they stayed on, although for not more than 3-4 years, but it needed the party to disband the CS and stop financial support, even after which some of the members of the CS continued to work for sometime struggling for its survival. Preeti Banerjee in her interview with Dhruv Gupta notes- 'Before this we had done different kind of work outside – we were not used to staying inside the house and

¹¹¹ p.60, Dina Gandhi, Ora, amra, era;ed. Sova Sen

¹¹² p.127, Raag Anuraag, Ravi Shankar, Ananda, Dec 2006; Translation from bengali mine

¹¹³ Sunil Jana in his unpublished autobiography, soon to be published by Oxford University Press according to Ram Rehman (in an interview with me) who has been working on the artist

¹¹⁴ Preeti Banerjee in interview with me on 4th May 2010

practicing for hours. Joshi had told us then – now your *true work* is to play the *tanpura* and devote your time to *riyaz* and rehearsing your steps.’¹¹⁵ But the *riyaz* or rehearsal was not only for a good ‘show’ but as PC Joshi said, for them it was also ‘true work’ – a work that would eventually lead them somewhere – they were not sure exactly where – but a place and time which would become as *true* as their *work* in their present. And this *nostalgia* for the *truth* – a future of their own gave them the impetus to deal with their difficult lifestyle ‘inside’, an ‘inner domain’ – where the ‘freezing point is called the melting point’.

¹¹⁵ p.5, *Charer doshok: uttal shomoy*; Dhruv Gupta, *Anushtup*, vol.4, ed. Anil Acharya, 1988; Translation from Bengali mine

✍ CHAPTER II

Artists, Activists, Communists or an Inconceivable Community?

I

In the previous chapter three basic arguments were made. Firstly, within a representative form of federal government the discourse of *stri swadhinata* or women's emancipation emerged as women were also constituent members of such a form of 'liberal democratic' system. Secondly, the 'women's question' was resolved within this discourse through arresting their role within a certain *biopolitical logic*. Thirdly, for women arrested within such biopolitical role and in a colonial situation where they were doubly repressed, both the *Act of Violence* and the *Act of Performance* created violent disposition within the aforesaid sign system.

Within such a discursive matrix, the women of the CS were subjects, agents, sites or points of struggle over political power personified in the possible and interacting figures of the activist, artist or the greater political figure of the communist. Such revolutionary and reflexive acts developed consciousness within them not only as subjects within the historical ambit that they were in, but also as subjects who were gendered at the same time. Preeti Banerjee, Reba Roychoudhury both belonged to the Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti (MARS) working for the aid of women and children in the famine stricken areas before joining the CS. Shanta Gandhi was associated with the All-India Women's Conference which had first met in Poona in January 1927, following the rigorous work concerning women's issues headed by Margaret Cousins and some others of the Women's India Association (WIA). In 1940 as a woman student Shanta Gandhi had also participated in the first ever all India meet of women students held at the Baradari of Lucknow inaugurated by Sarojini Naidu. In her inaugural speech Sarojini Naidu 'concentrated on telling these young women that the future of India lay in their hands, if they did not allow them to lie idle and waste them in only domestic drudgery. She urged them: 'Join with the young students and bring fresh blood into the mainstream of the battle of freedom'' (Renu Chakravarty, p.10). A consciousness thus had shaded the existence of these women as they started moving beyond the 'roles of being' assigned to them. But this consciousness did not exist as a

feminist consciousness whereby *feminism* could be broadly understood as that which focuses on considering women as the subject of analysis and action¹¹⁶. Nevertheless, it involved a critical response to traditional modes of thinking thus raising questions of 'equality' at the level of social, political and economic subsistence. Within a colonial mode of existence, the work for the *people*- the Nation which is being illegitimately ruled by a group of exploitative foreigners became imperative even in the understanding of gender equality. Therefore, one cannot raise a fatal question as Virginia Woolf did- 'What does 'our country' mean to me an outsider?'¹¹⁷ For as has been argued in the previous chapter, a colonized society develops its consciousness of sovereign existence by raising 'question' regarding its women as constituent of the same society, although such interrogation does not necessarily 'emancipate' them. Therefore, one could speculate that whereas, during almost the same period, women in the *free* Imperial State, experiences relegation to the 'outside', women within a colonial situation feels positioned within the *interiors* of any discourse as part of that very colonial identity. Hence, interestingly, certain postcolonial feminists find women to have formed the backbone of indigenous nations, 'who have formed the very core of indigenous resistance to genocide and colonization since the first moment of conflict between Indians and invaders'¹¹⁸. According to them, women of colour do not exist as a category against men and therefore there subsists an alienation from Western feminism which does not prove beneficial for them.

II

The activists: Given that a separate gendered category was not possible within the pervasive anti-colonial ideology of common oppression under foreign rule, a community culture was being developed from the distinct experiences of culture that

¹¹⁶ This may involve attention to differences within/between women

¹¹⁷ In *Three Guineas* (written in 1938), Virginia Woolf, A Harvest Book, Harcourt Inc., 1966

¹¹⁸ M. Annette Jaimes and Theresa Halsey talking about resistance on the North American Continent, p. 298, *American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in Contemporary North America*, *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*; ed. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat; University of Minnesota Press; 2004

different communities had in their own 'community of location'¹¹⁹. Therefore a 'community of interest'¹²⁰ was being evolved through the slogan of 'unity in diversity' creating a *national culture* whereby borrowing from Raymond Williams *culture* can be defined as a 'signifying system' i.e. the system of signs via which groups, organizations, institutions and also communities recognize and communicate with each other in the process of becoming a more or less influential formation within society.¹²¹ Thus *culture* is the medium which can unite a range of different groups, communities in a common project in order to make them into an ideological force, in this case a national force. The immediate task of the women, therefore become to help create such a 'unity'. Thus she becomes an activist whereby the activist could be understood as the actor – the one who acts for a certain belief or thought, one who is a performer, demonstrator and campaigner advocating for a certain thought. In the previous chapter, it was discussed how *conversion(s)* individual and collective, often lead *one* to *Act*. Such pursuit of performance as has been argued earlier resulted through subjective transformations which involved psycho-physical relocation. Such transformations nevertheless are subject to application of 'power' – 'power' which does not necessarily imply the existence of an agent. *Governmentality* or technologies of the self as Michel Foucault calls them along with technologies of domination lead to such *conversion(s)*. According to Foucault, even in case of women 'power' plays an important role in the formation of the Subject through such transformations or conversions leading to subjective relocation. Such a hypothesis leaves no space for understanding gendered categories as subjected to distinctive socio-historical phenomenon. Feminists like Elizabeth Grosz and Moira Gatens propose corporeal feminism as an alternative, rather a flip over of this hypothesis. According to them the body can be understood as the primary site of the embodied and sexually differentiated social practices which produce social life and, relatedly, as constituting

¹¹⁹ 'Communities of location' are created through networks of relationships formed by face-to-face interaction within a geographically bounded area. (pg.31, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, Baz Kersaw, Routledge, London and New York, 1992)

¹²⁰ 'Communities of interest' are formed through networks of association that are predominantly characterized by their commitment to a common interest. (ibid)

¹²¹ p. , *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams, Oxford University Press, New York, 1983

the form and the lived experience of the (embodied/sexed) self¹²². Judith Butler extends the proposition of the corporeal feminists by recommending in common with Foucault, a disaggregation of sexual categories and their heterosexist binary organization on the basis that the sexed body cannot be located outside of discursive frameworks: the body's sexuality and the direction of its desires are constructions within these frameworks. For Butler, there is no gender identity behind expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results.¹²³ Such 'expressions' in forms of roles create identity, gendered and otherwise. The activist also acquires his or her activist identity through such performative utterances, like the oath taking or even when christened as the *comrade*, sister, brother, mother etc. But such performative gestures do not necessarily dissolve in entirety, the many other identities that a subject carries. However, having converted oneself into a belief system, the next task becomes that of disseminating that thought and in the process help convert more 'selves'. The IPTA CS performances were such demonstration of thoughts and ideas of the IPTA which were mainly guided by the principle of creating a *national culture*. IPTA's rationale could be identified by its most invigorating slogan 'People's theatre stars the People'. This slogan in its humanistic passion creates the new social icon of the *national* 'people'. The performances of the IPTA CS of that period could not be recorded due to lack of available technology but an idea of the 'body' of the 'people' can be made from the available souvenirs of the programmes, similar demonstrations in the People's War/People's Age of the CPI and available testimonies of the activists and audiences or the 'people' themselves. Typical to any performative ritual or act of conversion, the first performance of the IPTA started with the *Call of the Drum* – 'Dance of Invocation for the Youth of India, rousing them to patriotism'¹²⁴ and the song composed by Ravi Shankar 'sare jahan se achha'- a 'people' better than any other 'people' as it were. Its interesting to note here, that in the *Natyasastra* said to be written between 200BC and 200AD, which becomes an important handbook of performance for developing an 'Indian' performance technique in post-independence

¹²² p.77, as elucidated by Chris Beasley in *What is Feminism?*, Sage Publications Ltd. London, 1999

¹²³ *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*, Judith Butler, Routledge, New York, 1999

¹²⁴ p.378, *Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, ed. Sudhi Pradhan

India, Bharata Muni to whom the authorship of the book is ascribed, prescribes the invocation of the beings of the three *lokas* (worlds) – Gods, men and the demons before starting the performance¹²⁵. It seems that within a secular liberal structure the religious elements have been secularized and transformed into invocation of man in the corporeal form of the ‘people’ alone.



Call of the Drum: 'Shanti as the nation's drummer: Sachin and Dina portray rallying of the nation's youth' (People's War, Jan 21, 1945)*

But later in the second season of CS performances *Divine Musicians*- 'Gandharvas, the celestial dancers and musicians, dance in front of the gods with 'Kartali' (small hand cymbals)' become the inaugural performance, paving way for the 'man' from the *divine* 'artist'. *She died of hunger* – 'a solo dance in classical style performed by Sachin Shankar, portraying the sorrow of a peasant of Bengal who arrives home to find that his wife and companion has died of hunger' acts as a newspaper report of the events that were taking place in Bengal. Similar other items can be found in the next set of performances of the Central Squad by now which had come to be known as the Central Cultural Troupe (from 1945 onwards), although the number of such items had decreased. Now a Squad can be understood as a crew, squadron or cadre (a term made famous by communist use) that performs a function, and brings a certain action to its completion whereas a troupe is one that is a band, an ensemble, that performs, but that

¹²⁵ By now, *Natyasastra* had already become quite popular as a manual.

performance is not guided by any function that it consciously carries forward. By the beginning of the second season of the CS performances, the activistic fervor had been eclipsed by a need '(to give) philip to creative activity' (Ravi Shankar in the Second Souvenir of IPTA CS, Sudhi Pradhan, p. 383). Although it maintained its *historical* tour of the new 'people' even in its second season. Both the ballets '*Spirit of India*' which the souvenir writes 'is a ballet based on the story of India since the advent of the British' of the first season and '*India Immortal*' – 'gives a picture of India from the earliest times to the present days touching momentous events that form the landmarks in the cultural history of India' (Sudhi Pradhan, p. 379, 386). The second season were such demonstrations of – a journey towards a 'people' *to be*, from a 'people' *that has been*.

A scene from 'Spirit of India': '*The hoarder with his clerk and servant*' (People's War, Jan 21, 1945)



'INDIA IMMORTAL: Ballet depicting the story of our country and our people from early times to the present days, the background of our rich cultural heritage and the growing unity of our people to end foreign rule.' (People's Age, Jan 6, 1946)



Along with the historical narrative performances were showcased cultures of different geographies or 'communities of location'. According to Sunil Munshi who was among the audience at that time, the performances of the IPTA were a collection of items one after the other, not necessarily interlinked by any logic of narration¹²⁶. In the 'People's War' and 'People's Age' magazines, tabloid sections of photographs of various cultures would be published every week during this period.

As a unit that had assigned itself the broader task of national unity, like the tabloids of the 'People's War'/ 'People's Age', the aesthetic of the IPTA was to construct a singular narrative of the *Nation* borrowing from the existing multiple units of *performance culture*, which were often incorporated as the traditions of the 'real people', the 'working class', the 'peasants' (influenced by the Communist Party's logic) of the Nation. Thus, 'Lambardi Dance' – 'A simple folk dance of the Lambardis, a gypsy tribe living in Hyderabad State', 'Dhobi Dance'- 'A folk dance commonly seen among the Dhobis of Andhra.', 'Collective Farmers' Harvest Dance'- 'This incorporates folk dances and music of more than one province of the Punjab, of Bengal, of Andhra and of the U.P.', 'Ramleela'- 'The troupe present a scene from the story of Ramchandra in a folk form very commonly seen in the UP villages' , of the first season and 'Sentry Dance'- 'The guards in the Frontier Provinces as they dance

¹²⁶ In interview taken by me

together at night in peace time.’, ‘Gajan’ – folk dance of Bengal in which ‘Shiva and Parvati, with their followers compete in dancing’, ‘Khadaun’- ‘A classical form of dancing with intricate foot-work, with wooden sandals’ and ‘Chaturanga’ of the Northeast and Bengal, ‘Holi’- ‘A glimpse of the colour festival in UP...’ of the second season, were incorporated as ethnographic tabloids of a larger singular *national narrative* of a ‘community of interest’.

‘The Lambadi- a tribal folk dance’ (People’s War, Jan 21, 1945)



'Ramleela as performed in the U.P. villages.' (ibid)



Gandhi-Jinnah phir miley: *'Gandhi-Jinnah meeting – the full story in ballet'* (ibid)

(Below): *Gandhi-Jinnah meeting—the full story in ballet.*



'CHATHURANG: *Classical Dance of Tippera (Bengal). A form now dying out, but being revived by the troupe.*' (People's Age, Jan 6, 1946)



CHATHURANG: *Classical Dance of Tippera (Bengal). A form now dying out, but being revived by the troupe.*

'GAJAN: *A folk dance of rural Bengal, with a ballad relating the story of Shiva and Parvati. A moment during the competition between Shiva and Parvati, with Shiva depicting the mood of 'terror'*' (ibid)



GAJAN: *A folk dance of rural Bengal, with a ballad relating the story of Shiva and Parvati. A moment during the competition between Shiva and Parvati, with Shiva depicting the mood of "terror."*

'HOLI: The popular harvest dance in the villages of the United Provinces' (ibid)



IPTA CS performances thus demonstrate a federation of *people(s)* whose icon or 'star' is the 'people' itself, meaning that the supreme power of representing lies in the hands of this 'people' that it stars. But by the second season of its performances this 'people' does not remain a common 'man' anymore but becomes the 'artist' who invokes not 'man' but a higher power in order to craft the 'people' using his artistry through 'intricate' work. But in both cases, the objective is naturalized by a historical logic of a 'spirit' of India and then a more self-determined 'immortal' India that imbibed its determination from a 'glorious' historical past..

'Aj shonabo ki kahini srihina bharatbhumir

Sampode shourjey chhilo jar sreshtho ashon dhoronir

Shatto nyayer deep jalilo buddho namey raj tonoy

Kabir hetha hindu muslim Milan-bani bilay

Raja Ashok badshah Akbarer raj ki hoe smaran

Shanti shukh o nyay dharmey sharthak proja palon.' (Spirit of India)¹²⁷

(What story would I tell you about the once beautiful land of Bharat/ Wealth and valor had made it the best in the world/ Buddha lit the candle of truth and justice/

¹²⁷ p. 37, Gananatya Katha, Sajal Roychoudhury

Kabir spread the word of hindu-muslim unity/ Does one remember the rule of Raja Ashoka and Badshah Akbar/ The rule of the subject was based on peace, happiness and the *dharma* of justice)

In all these articulations what remain as an essential 'expression', is the corporeality of a heteronormative 'people', where neither the heteronormative structure of the existing society is questioned nor is the idea of the 'people' which is rather revitalized through the demonstrative performances of its cultures. CS performances were thus activist in its aim of mobilizing and disseminating the idea of the one *national culture* of the 'people' and also artistic in its approach of creating and moulding this 'people' to an almost platonic ideal – 'sare jahan se achha' in that sense.

III

The artists: Before the IPTA CS brought together the 'sovereign national constituent'¹²⁸ cultures under the grand narrative of a *national culture* through an aesthetic of tabloid structures of its performances, in the imagination of its female constituent members, art existed as discrete creative experiences. Dina Gandhi recalls '... Junagarh is Narsi Mehta¹²⁹'s land, walking around the Girnar hills, the Gir forest, listening to stories of lions, *charan sahitya*¹³⁰... we also came across these very loaded and specific cultures of Gujarat... So I think the base for me was prepared well...'. The Nawab of Junagarh where she had spent most of her childhood was a theatre aficionado. As children the two sisters Shanta and Dina and their younger siblings Sharla and Bipin would go for the performances of the travelling theatre companies like Subodh Natak Company, Arya Naitik Samaj who would come to perform for the Nawab. There would be special performances of traditional theatre of Gujarat, Parsi Theatre and it was during this time that Dina Gandhi saw the

¹²⁸The CPI had demanded for *A family of free nations* as a 'freedom strategy'. In their 1946 election manifesto they wrote, 'The delegates of the All-India Constituent Assembly shall be elected by 17 sovereign national constituent assemblies based on the natural homelands of various Indian peoples... These seventeen national constituent assemblies shall be elected by universal adult franchise... Full and real sovereignty shall reside in the national constituent assemblies who will enjoy the unfettered right to negotiate, formulate, and finally, to decide their mutual relations within an independent India on the basis of complete equality' (p.82-83, *For the Final Bid for Power! : The Communist Plan Explained*, PC Joshi, People's Publishing House, Bombay)

¹²⁹ The Nawab of Junagarh

¹³⁰ A community based folk form of Gujarat

performances of the famous actors of Parsi Theatre like Mohanlalji, Master Bikhu, Amrit Janiji. In the Bahadur Khanji School, as a child she performed in the English play 'Pride and Prejudice' and also sang songs of Meera Bai.¹³¹ Earlier when she and Shanta Gandhi were at 'Pupil's Own School' at Poona run by certain Mr. and Mrs. Vakil who were earlier at 'Vishwa Bharati' founded by Rabindranath Tagore, they came across the Shantiniketan form of dance and music. Tagore himself would come and visit the school during *Basant Utsav*¹³². Shanta Gandhi recalls to have participated in many performances in the *Shantiniketan* style while still in school. In one of her school holidays when Shanta Gandhi had gone to her maternal uncle's house, who was in the congress at Bombay, she came across 'prabhat pheri'-s or early morning processions. Her maternal uncles' entire family would participate in these processions. Such processions of song and dance and political mobilization was very common during the 30's-40's. Preeti Banerjee remembers organizing such processions at Rajshahi in Bengal while in college. She would go around houses mobilizing women to participate in such processions and political activities for the country. Benoy Roy would often come to their locality to teach them patriotic songs. Although Preeti Banerjee's early training in music was from the records and radio of the period, she would listen to Pankaj Mallick, Bishwa Dey, Sachin Dev Burman and try to sing their songs. Rajani Sen, the poet was her father's friend and would often visit their house and sing. Her mother was a good singer and her sister would learn the sitar from Radhika Mohan Moitra. Preeti Banerjee also happened to learn a couple of songs from her when she had to sing for a competition at college. Reba Roychoudhury, a cousin of Preeti Banerjee, on the other hand does not remember having sung, danced or acted before she joined the cultural squads for famine relief work. Her brother Benoy Roy was of course, a famous lyricist and composer of patriotic songs by that time and it was with him that she left for Bombay in April 1944. In Bombay, Gul Bardhan after the death of her mother, stayed at her uncle's or her cousin's house. It was during this time that as a student she came in contact with Marxist literature and also the CPI. Having heard about Rabindranath Tagore, she insisted on joining *Shantiniketan* but according to her at that time Calcutta was bombarded and she was not allowed to go there, instead later she joined the J.J.

¹³¹ A famous Hindu mystical singer and devotee of Krishna

¹³² A seasonal festival

School of Arts. She seems to have been influenced by the revolutionary ideals of the period. She writes-‘I was very fond of Bhagat Singh and I wanted to carry a gun. Then Sarat Babu’s (Saratchandra Chattopadhyay) novel *Pather Dabi* and Victor Hugo’s novels – they influenced me a lot and I wanted to become a revolutionary. It was indeed a very romantic idea of revolution and at that age I did not really know what revolution was. But the desire was to be a good proletarian’.¹³³ She also had met Uday Shankar when he had performed Ramleela- a shadow play at Bombay. She writes that she was selected by him to join his troupe but it broke up before she could join. Shanta Gandhi was a member of this troupe and had joined the Almora Centre as a regular student. In the interview with Pratibha Agarwal she recalls, ‘In those days *dada* (Uday Shankar) had set up the Centre I think with the clear idea of or desire or goal of evolving indigenous Indian ballet...I feel that in Modern India it is Tagore who tried to evolve a language, a dramatic language which can express contemporary sensibility. He was the first and in his style of writing the final production can never be totally different from the writing. It’s an integrated whole and if you see it is dance, drama, word movement and sound and music as integrated in his style. That was the continuance of our inherited past. That is what one found in the *Natyasastra*...So *dada* was trying to evolve that in Almora, and I must say that in his training method there seems to have been some continuity... with Tagore’s effort... Tagore was not restricted to Bengal, he was an inspiration for all India and nobody could have been untouched by what he was doing...’(in interview with Pratibha Agarwal). ‘Tagore’s effort’ was that of giving language to - the ‘modern sensibility’ (which he also thought was ‘international’ in essence), the idea of a *national culture* of the ‘people’ that was experiencing *life* as a continuation of its traditions. Although in that canonical ‘tradition seeking art’, much was lost as lower forms¹³⁴. A huge population even in an atmosphere of a rising liberal secular *modernist cult*, still experienced life as regenerative religious and social happenings. About Rekha Jain her biographer Mahesh Anand writes- ‘Her house was located between Raawatpara and Lohargali (in UP). From Raawatpara would move out the processions of *Ram*’s wedding,

¹³³ p. 39, ‘What a tremendous movement it was...’, Gul Bardhan

¹³⁴ See Sumanta Banerjee’s ‘*The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*’ for a more detailed study of these forms

Krishnaleela, and processions of other mythical stories. The terraces would turn into *jalsaghar*¹³⁵ to see these performances. The Yamuna river was half a kilometer from her house. She would go for Kartik snan (holy bath) there with her mother. The *tairaki mela* (fair) would be held there. Rekha would be an audience there. She was introduced to the daily rituals, religious myths and 'Sukhsagar' by her mother'.¹³⁶ But for all these members of the CS, the creative processes that they had been experiencing through their lives found an activist goal with the programme of the IPTA. But even before they joined the programmatic scheme of activism, the famine had struck most of them as an 'event' that made them *Act* and also generated a new gendered consciousness. It was during this time that along with many other women who had joined the cultural movement in the wake of the famine that Preeti Banerjee, Dina Gandhi, Reba Roychoudhury, Shanta Gandhi became determined in their *Act*. Until then even when the *Youth Cultural Institute* (YCI) or various cultural squads would perform on public forums, finding women performers ready to appear on stage would be very difficult. Amarendra Mukherjee talking about plays performed by the YCI which comprised many educated women, writes- 'You must bear in mind that we are speaking of a time when play-acting by ladies was frowned at and the dramatist was too conscious of the fact. But it was also felt that this superstitious belief should be dealt a blow and if the youth were not rebels, who were? But ladies themselves, though keen to take part in the play, insisted that a scene must be there where there will be no male characters...' ¹³⁷ Rekha Jain recalls that she would be hesitant to go on stage if her husband did not accompany her as her co-actor in the scene in which she appeared. But at the wake of the Bengal Famine, when many cultural squads were formed, with the formation of only singing squads in the beginning, women started to join with vigor. Initially, these were the relatives of the male activists, famine relief workers but although one cannot deny the role of men in mobilizing women for such work, but soon the differential gendered experiences of famine, led women to *Act*. Under the 'Bhukha hai bangal' (Hunger stalks Bengal) campaign mostly led by the CPI, various organized efforts were being made for relief work. It was during this

¹³⁵ a room where performances take place

¹³⁶ p.16, *Rekha Jain*, Mahesh Anand, Rashtriya Natya Vidyalaya, New Delhi, 2010 (translated from hindi to English by me)

¹³⁷ p.34, *The Youth Cultural Institute (1940-42)*, Amarendra Mukherjee, Unity, Vol. 3, No.1, Oct-Dec 1953

period that Usha Dutt and Anu Dasgupta gave public performances of the ballet 'Mein Bhukha Hoon' (I am hungry) in order to collect funds. Kanak Dasgupta, a leader of the MARS wrote many songs along with Benoy Roy for the cultural squads. Reba Roychoudhury joined the ballet 'Mahamari' (Famine) along with Panu Pal. Tripti Mitra, Sova Sen, Manikuntala Sen, Bibha Sengupta, Kalyani Kumaramangalam, Lalita Biswas associated themselves with theatre, with the performance of 'Nabanna'¹³⁸ (one of the most successful plays on the famine) which was part of the festival called *Voice Of Bengal* that was organized to collect money for the famine stricken.¹³⁹ Participation of women in public performances became more readily accepted and established with the activities of famine relief committees and cultural squads and questions of gender decency, morality etc. became secondary to the 'occurrences', 'encounters', 'discoveries' of shifting moralities, meanings, realities at the heart of the famine. Paul de Man argues that 'modernity' 'invests its trust in the power of the present moment as an origin, but discovers that, in severing itself from the past, it has at the same time severed itself from the present.' Therefore modernity becomes a discovery, an encounter, and an occurrence. In that sense any event like in this case the 'famine' can be understood as an awakening of a *modernity*. But on the other hand for de Man unlike Modernity's *immediacy*, *modernism* becomes conscious of its own strategies 'in the name of a concern for the future – it discovers itself to be a generative power that not only engenders history, but is part of a generative scheme that extends far back into the past'. The performances of the famine relief work received a *modernist* turn with the formation of the IPTA. Unlike the *immediacy* of the earlier performances, the IPTA presentations became more conscious of its own strategies 'in the name of a concern for the future'¹⁴⁰ as also in terms of using the potential *efficacy* of performance for gradual socio-political transformation and conversion. Niranjana Sen¹⁴¹ writes that to make the work of the IPTA acceptable by

¹³⁸ which means 'new harvest'

¹³⁹ . *Chollish doshoker Gananatya Andolaner Mahila Shilpi*, Sajal Roychoudhury, Group Theatre, April 1988

¹⁴⁰ *Literary History and Literary Modernity*, Paul de Man, *Daedalus*, Vol.99, No.2, Theory in Humanistic Studies (Spring, 1970), pp.384-404)

¹⁴¹ Former General secretary of IPTA

the *people*, both of the city and the village, it was required to incorporate elements of the 'strong' tradition of folk performances of India and blend it with the 'high' artistic techniques of Europe. At the same time, the need to learn from 'Living Newspaper'¹⁴² of China was felt in order to reach out with the news of 'Home' and the 'World' to the people. Thus, while 1943-44 Bengal Famine becomes the *site* – 'to the extent that it imposes itself on all elements that contribute to its own existence as invoking 'by force',... an entirely new transcendental evaluation of the latter's intensity'¹⁴³ – this is what has been called the *Act* here. This *Act* which is also *revolutionary* in its force in that sense a *revolutionary Act* can be argued to be a 'historical reflex' that subverts any *biopolitical* 'role of being'. For women such an 'encounter' extended their role within the civil society in the aftermath of the famine as licit artists within the strategic schema of modernist art, but nevertheless, caution was maintained by censoring any 'cheap commercial glamour', 'pseudo-aesthetic posturing'¹⁴⁴ that might adulterate this newly opened horizon for the woman as the artist. Within the discourse of 'stri swadhinata', therefore, one more question about women was raised – that of the prerequisites or qualifications that made her an artist. It is interesting how in the testimonies of the IPTA women performers as well as in the histories of the IPTA, the existence of such a pervasive yet embedded idea of suitability is raised time and again and such suitability was found in women who were educated and also belonged to a good family/suited class. Dina Gandhi, Shanta Gandhi, Gul Bardhan, Reba Roychoudhury, Preeti Banerjee and Rekha Jain all mention in their interviews or autobiographies how they had received 'good' education and also aspired for higher education. Writing about the participation of women in the 40's in the IPTA movement (it is difficult to find such writings, as most of the historical documentation on the IPTA concerns only the overall achievements of the association) Sajal Roychoudhury, the author does not get weary about mentioning the family origins (in his case being a communist himself, a good communist family or marital relations of these female artists with good communist men are mentioned) and links of these women performers.

¹⁴² Living Newspaper was a kind of theatre started in China by People's Theatre Movement there. This theatre was performing news that was collected by reporters. (Niranjan Sen, *Epic Theatre*, April-May 78, p. 23)

¹⁴³ p.366, *Logics of World: Being and Event II*, trans. Alberto Toscano, Continuum, 2009

¹⁴⁴ p.40, *Rehearsals of a Revolution: the political theatre of Bengal*, Rustom Bharucha, Seagull, Calcutta, 1983

IV

The Communists: As we see above, certain ‘historical laws’ guide not only the creation of the being of any present but also their *force* often overturn the logic of these very ‘historical laws’. In Hegel’s philosophy these ‘historical laws’ are not only objective but also manifestation of Reason – a subjective and objective *force*, operating in the historical actions of men and in the material and intellectual culture. History is thus at one and the same time a logical and teleological process, namely progress in spite of inherent relapses and regressions in the consciousness and realization of *freedom*. Marx draws from this basic notion of an Hegelian progressive history but also modifies it in a decisive sense. For him, history progresses through the development of the productive forces which is progress, and not the realization of *freedom* but is the creation of *pre-requisites* of freedom, – pre-requisites which are in the interest of class society. Therefore for him history is not the manifestation of Reason but Reason lies only in the future to a classless society as a social organization geared to the free development of human needs and faculties¹⁴⁵. In Marx, historical laws can be separated from all teleology and neither is it a gradual progression which Badiou calls an ‘atonic world’ which is a world that lacks potential tensions that create *change* – but rather a communist world which is replete of *momentous moments* or ‘sites’ that makes the world move. Each such moment can be equated to one revolution of a wheel that makes *change of* any fixed spatio-temporal existence or law of any kind of ‘being’ possible. Therefore in a communistic world attainment of *freedom* is never possible, as the horizon of freedom is ever expanding. Thus there can be no ‘right’ to freedom. When in the early 20th century, the question of ‘self-determination’ was often raised in the context of the colonial society, Rosa Luxemburg argued that in any class society to speak of self-determination for the *people* would ordinarily mean the ‘self-determination’ of the ruling classes¹⁴⁶. In 1920, in the second Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) Lenin advocated *contextuality* as *raison d’être* of nationalities whereby ‘self-determination’ of such nationalities become an obvious imperative for the very existence of such

¹⁴⁵ As elucidated in *Soviet Marxism: A critical analysis*, Herbert Marcuse, Penguin Books, England, 1958

¹⁴⁶ In *The National Question: Selected Writings*, Rosa Luxemburg, Aakar Books, Delhi, 2009

nationalities¹⁴⁷. The fate of the communist movement in colonial India got decided with the popularity and acceptance of Lenin's method which resulted in the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943 as also localization of dialectic as against Marxian universal of class struggle. P.C. Joshi the general secretary of the Communist Party of India argued in the party organ *National Front* in April 1939 that the 'greatest class struggle today is our national struggle' of which Indian National Congress was the 'main organ'.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, communist movement in India remained national in character. But the interesting part is how does one negotiate history in a nationalized communist struggle? In case of materialist dialectic of the communist sort, Alain Badiou argues that what 'strikes one first is the stagnant immobility of the present, its sterile agitation, the violently imposed atonicity of the world... But, on the basis of some truth-procedures that unfold subjectivizable bodies, point by point, one reconstitutes a different past, a history of achievements, discoveries, breakthroughs, which is by no means a cultural monumentality but a legible succession of fragments of eternity'(Badiou, p.510). But, as has been mentioned earlier, within the liberal democratic structure, the constituent members or individuals give corporeal existence to the idea of the nation. And it is culture within a colonial situation along with 'inconceivable events' or 'sites' and shared experiences that act as a cohesive agent in creating national 'self-determination'. But the tendency of the modern democratic national structure is to create a cultural history, by weaving narratives in an Aristotelian succession of the beginning, middle and the end by a fetishization of that past leaving very little scope of the *Act* to dismantle that structure. The IPTA CS performances struggle between these different almost contradictory narratives of pasts. In the first season apart from the showcasing of various cultures, the CS presented one ballet –*Spirit of India*.

'This is a ballet based on the story of India since the advent of the British. It opens with the village bards relating the tales of heroism of ancient India. Then the British come, take advantage of civil war in the country and establish their foothold.

¹⁴⁷ Lenin's proposition has been quoted in detail in the previous chapter

¹⁴⁸ p.374, as quoted by Sumit Sarkar in *Modern India*

The scene is followed by a picture of the grinding poverty and misery of the common people under the yoke of landlords – which, next, gives way to that of big business introducing machinery and railways.

The outbreak of the war brings new hardships on the people, and with the demand of freedom comes the imprisonment of the nation's leaders. Disunity spreads among the people and famine and pestilence stalk the land. In their wake comes the Hoarder in his green mask of greed, who, under the protection of the Bureaucrat, makes big money.

In the final scene, rehabilitation has started, the peasants begin sowing the golden crop. The people finally join hands to end the regime of exploitation and oppression.' (Pradhan, p.380)

'Dokkhko taper gorol payi ore o Shiber dol

Dokkhko-shadhon, noyon bonhi jele shamne chol

Badhon chherar shadon kor shofol

Eki jon-shagar joare

Jodi hindu musulmaner nodi apon bege mele re

Tar jhor tufane udhao hobe shashon shoshok dol

Mukto hobe desher mati, desher akash, batash, jol

*Badhon cherar shadhon kor shofol.*¹⁴⁹ (Spirit of India)

(O' the followers of Shiva, who have been swept by the heat of sadness/ Convert the sadness into the fire of your eyes and move forward/ Make successful the work of breaking all bondages/ In the same ocean of humanity/ If the rivers of hindu-muslim flows in their own speeds/ Then in their rain and thunder would be defeated the rulers/ The land, the sky, the wind and the water of our country would be freed/ Make successful the work of breaking all bondages)

¹⁴⁹ p.41, Gananatya Katha, Sajal Roychoudhury

The narrative of *The Spirit of India* is borrowed from the earlier famine plays like 'Nabanna' and 'Antim Abhilasha/Jaban Bandi'. In that sense it is more of a narrative that was still under the effect of a historical reflex that motivates the other famine narratives. But at the same time, this performance of the CS was one of the first few performances that hints towards a glorious 'past' of an united India but even then that 'past' remains limited to 'tales of heroism' alone, rather than the representation of any pre-existent cultural monumentality. The narrative ends leaving the possibility of an *Act* to change the existent modalities of 'being'. Apart from the Famine narrative that the Communists had been using successfully in mobilizing relief funds as well as anti-colonial sentiments, the performances in this season also included *They Must Meet Again* whose theme was directly taken from the CPI's agenda of 'sovereign national constituencies' elected by universal suffrage on the basis of linguistic regions (modeled on the Russian Leninist model of mini-nationalities) and electing in their turn an all-India Constituent Assembly, with each region or 'nationality' retaining a right to secession.¹⁵⁰ The CPI had made its positions clear earlier in 1942 in an article 'National Unity Now' published in 'People's Age' on 8th August by asserting that the Muslim League leadership was 'playing an oppositional role vis-à-vis imperialism in a way somewhat analogous to the leadership of Indian National Congress itself...'¹⁵¹. The narrative of a singular history in *The Spirit of India* in the wake of the demand of 'sovereign national constituencies' does not become directly conflicting to the agenda of the CPI as at this point it also demanded of these 'constituencies' in their turn to elect 'an all-India Constituent Assembly'. But such an agenda in itself was guided by the principle of 'self-determination' (and a search for such a determination in the singular narrative of common past as in *The Spirit of India*) that was inherent to the demands of the CPI at this period. With these performances when the IPTA CS had gained much popularity, Ravi Shankar and many others of Uday Shankar's Almora Troupe joined the group. In this second season the ballet that CS produced was *Immortal India*.

¹⁵⁰ as been discussed earlier the footnote 11

¹⁵¹ Gul Bardhan's claim ('What a tremendous movement it was...') of Shanti Bardhan and others leaving the troupe in 1946 on account of CPI's supporting the two nation theory and PC Joshi's asking them to perform on that, seems a bit absurd because the IPTA CS was formed much after the CPI took a stand of 'sovereign national constituencies' and also it was not the same as the demand for two separate sovereign nations

It 'gives a picture of India from the earliest times to the present days touching momentous events that form landmarks in the cultural history of India. It starts from early worship of the Himalayas and passes through past impacts of culture to modern times.' The obsession with a national culture increases in the performances of the second season of the CS giving it a monumentality that it did not have earlier. Both Ravi Shankar, the director of music in this season, and Shanti Bardhan the director of dance in the season talk about 'our rich cultural heritage, handed down from generation to generation' (Pradhan, p.383) in the notes written for the brochure by them. In this ballet, a worker dreams of 'puja' and 'invocation dance' in the Himalayas, rivers-land-harvest, Buddhists-Muslims-Chaitanyas – 'all our people flourish together'. A magician charms this *people* with his magic flute. 'Traitor plans against the Nawab with the Magician – Nawab is overthrown and crown given to traitor – traitor and magician together rob the people... Individual revolts of the people against this oppression is suppressed by the magician – the people rise once again in an attempt to revive their own culture.' The ballet ends with the black marketeers and hoarders 'devour(ing) the food and cloth themselves and dance(ing) in frenzy – the dream (of the worker) is shattered – one women with a child in her arms rises alone questioning whether life will always be dark... but the answer is heard that the people unite, will rise and will fight to be *free*¹⁵².' (ibid, p.388) Thus a singular narrative driven by the existence of a *national culture* and shared experience of exploitation by the foreign 'magician' runs along the linear thread of fictional/real accounts.

At this point it is necessary to note that the CPI between 1942-1945 had received serious setback as a popular political movement as a result of the continuous tension that it faced due to the contradictions of Nationalism's localized logic and Communism's universal dialectic. While British policies during this period of war remained extremely repressive and reactionary, Britain also happened to be an ally of the socialist state Soviet Russia, when Hitler invaded Russia. After a lot of hesitation, in January 1942 the CPI lined up with the international communist movement calling for support to the anti-fascist 'people's war' 'even while reiterating the standard Congress demands for independence and immediate national government. But such a

¹⁵² italics are mine

dual position of both support of war, whose effects were directly making an impression in India in terms of socio-economic consequences, and also, antagonism towards the colonial rule of the same British government, although that no more remained a precondition for support to the national movement, on the one hand helped lift the ban on the party, making it easy for the party to work and on the other hand, made the party extremely unpopular amongst the *people*. The performances of the IPTA CS and the call for 'unity' in order to form a *national community* on the grounds of the existence of a singular linear 'past' (as against fragmented 'eternity' of the dialectical materialist sort as argued by Badiou) in the post-war situation was a strategy also to win back the *people* it had lost during the war years. Preeti Banerjee remembers, 'In 1942 the party made a huge mistake – during the movement (Quit India), our cultural movement could break that isolation... the isolation due to the position on 'people's war' could be overcome because of our cultural effort.'¹⁵³ Thus through a coalition of histories the CS created a performance of paradox whereby on the one hand it upheld the liberal democratic rhetoric of nationalism through the use of linear narratives and on the other hand highlighted issues that were thought to be in alignment with the Marxist universal logic of a classless society. The huge success of the IPTA CS performances of the first two seasons was not merely due to its complete potential to represent a *national culture* that the national bourgeoisie aimed for¹⁵⁴, or due to the sincere socio-economic issues that these performances often talked about in concurrence with the CPI's often chaotic agendas, but more fundamentally it was a result of a *communitas* that it created for itself. By *communitas* is meant 'a direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities'¹⁵⁵ whereby it (the *communitas*) allows performance to 'play' with the audience's fundamental beliefs, without producing immediate rejection. For it is 'the ludic nature of the audience's role that allows it to engage with ideological difference, that allows rules to be broken (via authenticating conventions) while rules are kept (via rhetorical conventions). This paradox links theatrical performance to carnival and other forms of public

¹⁵³ in interview with me

¹⁵⁴ Preeti Banerjee talking about their performances in New Delhi recalls, 'Sarojini Naidu used to watch our programme everyday. She used to specifically like the depiction of the history of India' (p. 8, *Charer Doshok: ittal shomoy*, Dhruvo Gupta)

¹⁵⁵ p.47, *From Ritual to Theatre*, Victor Turner, Performing Arts Journal Pub., New York, 1982

celebration...’ (Kersaw, p.28). The IPTA CS performances thus became unique in their successful juggling with different ‘identities’ and ‘ideologies’. PC Joshi writes- ‘The Central Troupe of the IPTA was just coming into its own not only politically, professionally and organizationally, but also earning a reputation for attempting something unique and distinctive in our cultural life. It is then, during the end of 1947, that a sectarian offensive inspired by the incorrigibly Left comrade Ranadive was put into operation through the good-hearted but narrow minded treasurer, Ghate. As the treasurer, he complained that too much of the central funds were being wasted in cultural work by subsidizing the IPTA troupe while its earnings were nominal.’¹⁵⁶ Gul Bardhan remembers this period, ‘In 1946 we did an all-India tour and went to Lahore with *India Immortal*... The left in the party felt that the Central Squad was a white elephant. ‘So much money is spent and they won’t even work for Party propaganda (apparently they were asked to do a performance on the two nation theory, which was not even the CPI’s agenda, but what is possible is that they were asked to do a performance on ‘sovereign constituent nationalities’ as against a federal system that the Congress had proposed)... So, after a very successful all-India tour with *India Immortal* the Party disbanded the Central Squad. During our tour we received a lot of appreciation everywhere we went and because of our work a large number of intellectuals and artists came closer to the Party and many became Party supporters. But the Party did not realize that. When we returned to Bombay we were told that it had been decided to disband the Central Squad. Naturally the sword first fell on Shanti Bardhan and four others who were not party members. They had to leave. There was no debate or discussion. So Shanti-da, Ravi Shankar, Abani-da, Sachin and Narendra Sharma left together. All the members of the Central Squad felt very sad and sorry about the whole thing. We felt that this was absolutely wrong but we were too young to speak against the leadership.’ (Gul Bardhan, p.42) One of the reasons for the party’s high-handedness regarding this issue was its newly found self confidence. After the war years, especially after the victory of Soviet Russia over the fascist powers, CPI could move on from its ‘people’s war’ line to more populist regional agendas in order to recover from the damage that their party line had caused them in terms of popularity during the war years. They pioneered the Kisan Sabha movement, trade union activities, in providing leadership to the Telengana movement

¹⁵⁶ p.69, A Dedicated and Creative Life, PC Joshi

in Hyderabad, Tebhaga Movement in Bengal, movements in Kerala etc. which ultimately resulted in their emerging as 'the principle contenders of the Congress in several provinces' in the election of 1946. (Sarkar, p.426) But at the same time continuous attack on the communists with regard to their earlier anti-Quit India movement and 'people's war' positions, bitterness resulting from the trials of the Indian National Army (INA) war prisoners (who under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose sought the help of Japan, an ally of Germany in liberating India), and condemnation of their violent actions against the government by the Congress and mainly by Gandhi, often created isolations (in spite of their position of a Congress, Muslim League and Communist united leadership against the Imperial forces) which resulted in a ghetto-like mentality amongst many of the CPI members and this also created the need to shield itself more sternly even in their involvement with the CS as they dictated the terms with frequent 'do this, edit that' (Ravi Shankar, p.127) vigilance.

After the IPTA CS was disbanded Shanti Bardhan, Ravi Shankar, Sachin Shankar and Narendra Sharma joined the 'Indian National Theatre' of the Congress where they produced *Discovery of India* conceptualized by Jawaharlal Nehru. The rest of the troupe continued with their work at Andheri and produced a third season of performances in 1946-47. Preeti Banerjee recalls, 'I have forgotten the names of the items, actually these are memories of long ago (the interview was taken in 2010), although I remember the names of the ones that we performed earlier – those of 45-46... the songs would be composed by Benoy-da (Benoy Roy), others would add folk tunes of different regions – Dashrathlal would add folk tunes of Bihar, Prem (Dhawan) those of Punjab. Benoy-da would write the songs and the hindi ones would be written by Prem... These were not performed for many days though.'¹⁵⁷ The third season of the performances were more propagandist in nature. The two main ballets of this season *Naval Mutiny* and *Kashmir* were directly conceptualized from the party's position on the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) mutiny in Bombay on 18-23 February 1946 and its agenda of forming 'sovereign constituent assemblies'. In her interview with Dhruvo Gupta taken in 1988 she remembers, '...we had prepared a ballet on the RIN mutiny in Bombay. We would begin with the song 'jana gana mana' (this became the

¹⁵⁷ in interview with me

national anthem of India after Independence). The British government had banned all the items of this season including 'jana gana mana'. The song 'Vande Mataram' would be allowed. We would secretly perform the ballets by changing their names. Nobody would rent us auditoriums... we made our own stage within the compounds of the house at Andheri, where we would perform the ballets. We would invite the navy personnel.' Reba Roychoudhury mentions some other items they had performed in this season like 'Gandhi-Jinnah phir miley' on the talks between Gandhi and the Muslim League leader Jinnah on the issue of separate nation state formations and 'New Village' where a village woman kills an exploitative feudal lord, 'Collective farm'.¹⁵⁸ The use of communist propaganda became apparent not only in the contents used during this period but also in the apparent use of communist symbols. For example in the ballet called 'New Village', one of the songs explicitly refers to the red symbol.

'... hindu muslim bhed mitaiboi shob mil korboi kamao

Beet gayi hai sab durdinwa

Ek shonge jiiiboi ek shonge morboii

Chahe jae poranwa

Kisan Sabha ke baat manbei kor bai shob kahanwa

*Hum uraibei lal nishanwa*¹⁵⁹

(...we shall destroy the clash between the hindu muslims, together we shall diminish it/ The bad days are gone/ We shall live and die together/ Let our lives leave us/ We shall listen to Kisan sabha and do as has been said/ We will flow the *Red symbol*¹⁶⁰)

Although for some time the CPI financially supported their work but within a year of disbanding the CS, the remaining members were asked to go back to their own regions and 'use whatever you have learnt' (Reba Roychoudhury talking about what PC Joshi had told them) in their work at the regional IPTAs.

¹⁵⁸ in her interview with Pratibha Agarwal

¹⁵⁹ p.45, Gananatya Katha, Sajal Roychoudhury

¹⁶⁰ Italics are mine

IPTA CS had lost its earlier vigor in its third season of performances as the day of liberation of India from the rule of the British government approached nearer. When Dhruvo Gupta asked Preeti Banerjee the reason behind this she replied, ‘...I think it was not the failure of the IPTA alone – rather our failure in everything – the private ego had become more important than the collective, the fall within the group, one should see it adding to all of these.’ According to Shanta Gandhi, ‘...the entire IPTA period movement was basically based on humanism, a humanism of a very left orientation. Marxism had played a very leading role. People connected with the communist party that had been the driving force in this and it was through these people that the movement was linked up with the people’s movement like Kisan movement, Trade union movement, student’s movement, women’s movement... there was no difference of goal in getting the British out...This was not possible after Independence...’¹⁶¹

IPTA CS had set out to form a *national community* through the use of the narratives of real/fictional, linear/tabloid-esque paradoxical understandings of history. The efficacious objective of the CS in the multiplicity of contextualities and ideologies driven both by nationalism and universalism at the same time did succeed in creating a huge support base among the *people* which I have called the *communitas* borrowing from Victor Turner. But in itself the troupe of the CS could not remain a ‘community’ as a result of the very clashes that created a *communitas* for them. Here I would like to elucidate on the idea of a ‘community’ as against the idea of a ‘collective’. In a lecture on ‘Communism, the word’ sent to the London Conference in March 2009, Jean-Luc Nancy points out that the word Communism ‘says something about property. Property is not only the possession of goods. It is precisely beyond (and/or behind) any juridical assumption of a possession. It is what makes any kind of possession properly the possession of a subject, that is properly an expression of it. Property is not my possession: it is me.’ He further continues ‘But me, I, never exists alone. It exists essentially *with* other existing beings. The *with* is no external link, it is no link at all: it is togetherness- relation, sharing, exchange, mediation, meaning and feeling. The *with* has nothing to do with what is called collective. Collectivity means collected people: that is, people taken together from anywhere to the nowhere of the

¹⁶¹ in interview with Pratibha Agarwal

collectivity or of a collection. The co- of collective is not the same as that of communism. This is not only a matter of etymology (*munire* versus *ligare*). This is a matter of ontology: the co- of collectivism is a mere external "side by side" which implies no relationship between the sides or between the parts of this "partes extra partes".¹⁶² He argues that the co- in Communism which is also a derivative from the words *community-koinonia, communitas*¹⁶³ consists of not the categorical *with* but the existential *with*. A categorical *with* in a more or less Kantian fashion, implies a formal relation and does nothing more than distinguish between *with* and *without*. An existential *with* implicates that neither you nor me are the same together or separate- this *with* belongs to the being of us.' This is something the Communist Party failed to understand. The CS was constituted of separate individuals or constituents. Although the CPI through party classes had tried to *convert* them into being communists but the very knowledge of such a process working to change the 'self' into a 'communist subject' made the members of the CS raise questions about the very 'truth' value of the Party¹⁶⁴. Although party activities had attracted many of these individuals to join the movement as activists but the conscious process of their *conversion* made that same party an *objective* forum which accepted the existence of no individual subjectivities. On the one hand the CPI aimed at a 'one-ness' of being rather than a togetherness of existence or existential *with* between the members and on the other hand the failure to *convert* made the party suspicious of the member's integrity. Thus, the failure of the IPTA CS could be understood as the acceptance of the party's own failure to make the CS members an homogenous troupe as this became a condition for existence as a *single troupe* and at the same time its failure to understand 'that neither you nor me are the same together or separate- this *with* belongs to the being of us' – a being that had been instead possible amongst the audience for whom the CS performed between 1944-1946, making them become the 'communitas' without any conditionality.

**All the sketches in this chapter are by Chittaprasad*

¹⁶² Communism, the word; Jean-Luc Nancy; http://www.lacan.com/essays/?page_id=126

¹⁶³ The word emerges at times of profound social transformations and/or trouble or even destructions of social order. This is the case at the time before Christian era as well as at the final time of feudalism or later at the time of the first industrial revolution. (Jean-Luc Nancy)

¹⁶⁴ Ravi Shankar's doubts on such classes has been discussed in the previous chapter

✍️ CHAPTER III

Freedom and IPTA Central Squad: Utopia, Nostalgia and the Promise

Freedom: *'We are condemned to be free' - Jean Paul Sartre*

So the independence of the Indian sub-continent happened – in a ‘tryst with destiny’ it finally became free on 15th August 1947 from the clasp of an Imperial rule which set the ball of a ‘federal democratic republic’ rolling into the court of a geography that although existed earlier but now experienced *freedom* in its free corporeal existence or in the form of a ‘*free* people’. In so far as experience is sense, data, cognition and also feelings and expectations that comes to us verbally as also in images and impressions whereby it refers to an active self – to a human being who not only engages in but shapes an action¹⁶⁵ – experience is personal. But in case of something like the freedom of a ‘people’, this experience is both shared, as through the idea of one ‘people’ and at the same time individual. But for the individual who is consciously a constituent member of the one idea ‘people’, the shared experience becomes a necessary social precedence. But in society the experience of freedom is essentially linked to the empirical existence of signs of freedom in the form of social liberties. For a ‘people’ that was once colonized, therefore freedom is liberation from the colonizer followed by subsequent social liberties – which builds in this ‘people’ as a fundamental expectation. Therefore freedom in itself when understood as a shared experience of a national freedom is not a revolutionary idea but rather a developmental idea where freedom comes through socio-economic developments. In the wake of 15th August 1947, the ‘people’ of India had similar expectations. Although it was aware of the existing socio-economic disparities but at the same time the fact that the Imperial rule was over which was an empirical truth, the expectation that it was thereby *free* now onwards thrilled the entire population as Jawaharlal Nehru the first prime minister of the country declared – ‘At the stroke of midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to *life and freedom*¹⁶⁶.’ For the IPTA, which had till now created for its audience a *national culture* that acted as a cohesive

¹⁶⁵ ‘Experience and its expressions’, Edward M. Bruner, *The Anthropology of Experience*, ed. Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner, University of Illinois Press, 1986

¹⁶⁶ italics are mine

agent, the sudden slogan of ‘yeh azadi jhoota hai’ (this freedom is a lie) under the aegis of the CPI was betrayal in so far as freedom showed as empirical existence. The IPTA thus not only lost its popularity amongst its own audience but ultimately once the CPI realized that the CS of the IPTA had acted as the voice of the same ‘people’ it (CS) aimed to create – which was a ‘one people’ of India that saw the withdrawal by the Imperial power from the centre of governance as the biggest sign of freedom -

‘Aab azadi ki chhiri hai ladaiya

Sakhi hum sab bhi chalo ji

Bir sab waha lade

*Milkey uthaye hatiyar, sakhi hum sab bhi chale ji*¹⁶⁷ (Lambardi dance)

(Now the fight for freedom has spread/ *Sakhi* (female friend) lets go/ the brave fight there/ let’s pick up the weapons together, *Sakhi* let’s also go)

- the CPI called it off and asked its members to go back to their own regions. It is not surprising that only a few months later in March 1948, the CPI was banned by the *free* ‘people’s’ government. The members of the CS disillusioned by the entire episode disintegrated from the commune into various modes of living. Dina Pathak when asked about the link of the IPTA with the Communist Party said, ‘I would say only this much that the forces which were linked to life, their activities for life, IPTA’s association with them was in those activities... Our anti-British feeling gave a revolutionary touch to our work.’ (in interview with Pratibha Agarwal) For Dina Pathak, who had promised her father that in Bombay she would not join any political party, work for ‘life’ was possible through participation in the IPTA movement. The ‘revolutionary touch’ that she talks about was the thought of *freedom* when freedom itself did not get defined as an empirical existence but was believed to be possible once the British left. Shanta Gandhi remembers, ‘...a vital element of this movement and because there was no difference of goal (with the Communists) in getting the British out, people of all shades, of all liberal thoughts, all combined and joined hands in this. (in interview with Pratibha Agarwal) Therefore, the IPTA’s principal aim was *freedom* that was believed could be achieved by the removal of the British by an equal

¹⁶⁷ p.121, Rekha Jain, Mahesh Anand

sharing of this responsibility in the path towards *freedom*. Thus one could say *freedom* was conceived as emancipatory for all. If freedom was emancipatory for all then why did the IPTA fail to rejoice the freedom it achieved – a freedom it had aimed for! Is Communist freedom separate from the freedom of a ‘federal democratic republic’? Is proletarian freedom different from the ‘people’s’ freedom? And is a woman’s freedom different from the man’s freedom? These questions arise when one tries to understand the failure of the IPTA after ‘freedom’ was achieved from the colonial power. Preeti Banerjee thinks, ‘...all sections have to be covered. Can anything be achieved only with rigid politics. Nothing exists like that. See what CPM (Communist Party of India Marxist which started to fall in West Bengal after a continuous rule of three decades under which the IPTA West Bengal functioned after it came to power) has done, is IPTA functional anymore?! They don’t know how to call everyone.’ (in interview with me in 2010) Preeti Banerjee raises the question of *freedom for all* – an equal freedom or a *freedom shared equally* by all. For the post-colonial people, the word ‘freedom’ remains meaningful as long as it is opposed to ‘subjugation’ or the word ‘colonial’ people. It is purely a political category whereby freedom is understood by the exchange of power from the foreign inhabitants to the native inhabitants. But nevertheless, the philosophical freedom leaves its ‘trace’ in that thought in so far as ‘a certain unconstrainedness, a certain *liberality*, the principal characteristic of which is an ability to make everything possible’¹⁶⁸. For the Marxist, freedom is the recognition of necessity – the subjugation of freedom to necessity – in so far as necessity predestines existence – ‘We are condemned to be free’. Sartre arrived at this idea from the unique fact that ‘subjectivity – which names the substantial self that is supposed to have the power to support itself and to secure its identity – cannot keep itself afloat. The foundering of subjectivity does not mean that human beings, as weak and poorly equipped vessels, are not strong enough to actualize what they desire. With such a conception of human fragility Sartre arrived at the formula...’(Fenves, p.xxiii) But this very formula has its genealogy in the Hegelian conception of *dialectic* whereby any present state of affairs was in the

¹⁶⁸ For Hume Freedom is not a property of human subjectivity. It does not distinguish human beings from other things – in that sense freedom is of/for all. The idea of freedom in its retreat from any discourse leaves a trace of itself. This freedom or liberality as he calls it expends itself, in the ‘gentle force’ called ‘the imagination’ and the imagination, true to its word, makes possible for the soul to perceive anything. (*A treatise of Human Nature* by Hume as discussed by Peter Fenves in the Foreword to *The Experience of Freedom*, Jean Luc Nancy, Stanford University Press, California, 1993)

process of being negated, changed into something else. For Marx the agent of this change was the proletariat class. This man-nature dialectic and the attainment of the 'new' every time is what Sartre calls condemnation to freedom. Therefore, in Marxism as has been argued in the previous chapter, *freedom* can never be achieved but is itself a process that holds in it the 'trace' of a philosophy of freedom – which is all possibility. Here lies the contradiction between the conception of *freedom* for the colonized subject for whom freedom is an achievement and the communist subject for whom it's an ongoing process. Thus IPTA CS's failure lay in the contradictions on which it was built, and this same contradiction led the members of the IPTA towards two distinct paths post-independence although both carried the 'trace'.

*A whole way of struggle or a whole way of life*¹⁶⁹: Aware of the developmental possibilities in *free* India, Shanta Gandhi declares, '...it would have been better if this movement born in a much more organized way served as a closer link or with an organizational link with the Akademis when they came into existence...' (in interview with Pratibha Agarwal) Aparna Dharwarkar in her book on theatre in post-independence India notes, 'With the reoriented cultural politics of the first decade of independence as a backdrop, the Sangeet Natak Akademi's 1956 drama seminar marks a symbolic end to the theatre movement of the 1940's...' ¹⁷⁰ In this seminar the need to disassociate theatre from specific political program was felt along with rethinking it comprehensively in relation to the remote and proximate past. Among the participants of this seminar were the erstwhile members of the IPTA like Shombhu Mitra, Dina Pathak, Nemichandra Jain among others. 'Some of the seminar's most vocal and influential spokesmen Mulk Raj Anand, the actor Balraj Sahni (both associated with the PWA and the IPTA respectively)... argue(d) that colonial and late-colonial theatre institutions are no longer usable and anticipate a future theatre radically unrelated to its colonial past.' (Dharwarkar, p.38) Dina Pathak remembers this period, 'I was apolitical for a long time. Though I was politically aware but was not associated with any political party. The work of the IPTA

¹⁶⁹E.P. Thompson in his review of *Culture and Society* by Raymond Williams proposed 'whole way of struggle' as a better definition of culture than Raymond's own 'whole way of life'. (Tony Pinkney in the *Introduction to The Politics of Modernism* by Raymond Williams, Verso, 1989)

¹⁷⁰ p.37, *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory, and Urban Performances in India since 1947*, Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker, Oxford University Press, 2005

(regional) had to be done somehow - how we could do more plays, there would be debates on that. Until I had ideological clarity about a play I did not find it worthwhile to do that play. So immediately I realized that theatre was a grand *sastra* (science) and it has a huge existence by itself. So I went to Ahmedabad where I started learning again. I read the Natyasastra, Stanislavsky, Abhinayadarpana and I started taking it (theatre) seriously as a science.' Due to the popularity she had gained during her association with the IPTA, Dina Pathak soon started to get offers to act in films. After CS broke off, as a result of financial constraints she had to take up work in the film and in the All India Radio where she sang once in a while. Around 1949, she wrote the play *Lokbhavai*, influenced by the people around her at a Harijan basti (slum of untouchables) where she stayed for some time. She wanted to do 'sophisticated plays' therefore she thought of involving the *harijan* people in her play *Lokbhavai*. In the 50's she performed the lead in plays like Rasiklal Parikh's *Mena Gurjari*, Saratchandra Chatterjee's *Vijaya* and *Biraj bahu* and Ibsen's *Doll's House* under Jaishankar Sundari in Natmandal, Ahmedabad which she co-directed. She taught the 'new' theatre in Natmandal along with Parikh and Jashwant Thaker, brought the form of Beijing Opera for experimental performances, actively promoted Bhavai, and herself directed original Gujarati drama. Moving back to Bombay, she won awards for her performance in Hindi films such as Basu Chatterjee's *Sara akash* in 1969. (in interview with Pratibha Agarwal) When Shanti Bardhan and Gul Bardhan planned to start the Ranga Sri Little Ballet Troupe in 1952, they asked Dina Pathak to send some *harijan* children (ibid) with whom and some others they started their own group in which they composed their own 'music, composed ballets, worked on a new dance form using human puppets and travelled far and wide to learn urban, folk and tribal dances... In 1947, Shantida, under the banner of Indian Renaissance Group¹⁷¹, choreographed the ballet *Discovery of India* based on Nehru's book. Financial constraints impeded its progress and Shantida developed tuberculosis. But I convinced him to start work again. The Little Ballet Troupe was established the following year with support from like-minded people. We started working on a ballet based on *Ramayana* using human puppets... In 1953, for the first time the Little Ballet

¹⁷¹ Shanti Bardhan had initially choreographed *Discovery of India* for Indian National Theatre where he was for a one year contract. Later he reproduced the same Artist's Renaissance Group or Indian Renaissance Group which was founded by himself, Prabhat Ganguly, Rajendra Shankar and Ravi Shankar (Gul Bardhan, p.44)

performed in Mumbai. By then dance had become a common bond for Shantida and me and we married in 1953, just a year before he died. To ensure the success of the show, I arranged a *sarod* performance by Ustad Ali Akbar and three short dance performances. We collected about Rs 2,000, which helped us purchase costumes and musical instruments for *Ramayana* — that was a turning point and it turned out to be a huge success... In 1984, Ranga Sri Little Ballet Troupe shifted to Bhopal — the state government allotted us land to construct our own building. When Shantida passed away in 1954, rehearsals of the ballet *Panchatantra* were in progress. It was tough to carry on and I was disillusioned. Almost fortuitously, Pandit Nehru sent a message through his daughter Indira, saying he wanted to meet me. When I told him I was thinking of disbanding the group, he talked me out of it and assured me that money would not be an obstacle. The next day, I received a cheque and the work on *Panchatantra* continued. Nehru attended the performance when it was staged in Delhi and continued to be there to encourage us.¹⁷² The developmental projects in the post-independence India continued, as a concrete cultural policy was being formulated in the years after 1947. National School of Drama (NSD) was set up by the Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1959 as one of its constituent units. Shanta Gandhi joined the NSD as a teacher between 1958-1959. She later became the chairperson of the institute in the 80's. She extensively studied the Sanskrit theatrical forms and was asked to teach Classical Indian drama and traditional drama at NSD where she directed *Madhyam Vyayog*, *Swapnabasdatta*, *Vikramurvashi* etc. Rekha Jain who was in Bombay with her husband Nemichandra Jain till April 1947 (her husband had already left in March) left for Allahabad once they were asked to go back to their own regions by PC Joshi. In Allahabad, she joined the Allahabad IPTA. The crisis that Allahabad IPTA was facing during this time was unlike in Bengal or Bombay which saw the transgression of the boundaries of social norms by women at the wake of the Bengal famine and the travelling performances that mobilized women to transgress such norms (already discussed earlier), women of Allahabad due to historico-political situation still found performing in public as deprecating. She remembers, 'In Allahabad so I would go to houses and persuade the sister of our friends to join. I would say that I am taking responsibility. So I used to go and pick them up and drop them back'. Rekha Jain's

¹⁷² Interview of Gul Bardhan with Runa Chakraborty in [Harmonyindia.org](http://www.harmonyindia.org) on May 2007
http://www.harmonyindia.org/hportal/VirtualPageView.jsp?page_id=4975

biographer notes, 'It was in this town that Rekha Jain in the Hindi literary convocation, Prayag received the title of 'Sahitya Bisharad' (1949), from the Prayag music academy she received 'Sangeet Prabhakar' for Hindustani classical singing (1952), from the Uttar Pradesh board received high school certificate (1952) and intermediate (1954) and from Allahabad University B.A. first year (1955) educational qualification certificate.' (Mahesh Anand, p. 37) Later after moving to Delhi in 1956 she joined 'Children's Little Theatre' which later came to be known as 'Delhi Children's Theatre'. In 1958 she participated in a workshop organized by the Asian Theatre Institute and UNESCO where she got trained in children's theatre. Shanta Gandhi had also joined this workshop and later they together produced *Do billiya aur bandar* along with Rajendranath and *Peter and Wolf* along with Shibnath. In 1976 she founded 'Umang' which was a children's theatre group and continued to work for children's theatre.¹⁷³ Ruby Dutt, the youngest member of the CS, and the sister of the revolutionary leader Kalpana Dutt, moved to Allahabad once PC Joshi (who was married to Kalpana Dutt) shifted to Allahabad after being removed from his post of general secretary of the CPI on grounds that he was a revisionist. Rekha Jain and Nemichandra Jain were their neighbours. After marrying PC Joshi (junior) in 1965, she moved to Delhi as she also happened to get a fellowship from Sangeet Natak Akademy around this time. When her husband left for Calcutta for his work, she started to stay in Delhi with Nirmala Joshi, her relative, who happened to be the secretary of the Sangeet Natak Akademy. Ruby Dutt started learning Kathak from the Bhartiya Kala Kendra with the fellowship. After she gave birth to a son, in order to bring him up, she left dance and started teaching at a montessori school¹⁷⁴. While Shanta Gandhi, Dina Pathak, Rekha Jain, Ruby Dutt associated themselves either with the cultural projects of nation building or contributed within the national cultural scenario, Preeti Banerjee, Reba Roychoudhury went back to Calcutta and got involved not only with the IPTA there, as Dina Pathak, Rekha Jain had done, but also associated themselves with the activities of the communist party which very soon was banned. Reba Roychoudhury in her interview with Khaled Choudhury remembers that after returning from Bombay in February 1947 along with Benoy Roy and Preeti Banerjee, she joined 'the party' as 'whole timer'. They were paid a wage of rupees

¹⁷³ *Rekha Jain*, Mahesh Anand

¹⁷⁴ PC Joshi (junior) in interview with me

twenty-five/thirty per month which would not be sufficient. She would go to Bangiya kalalaya to rehearse the ballet *Shahider dak*. 'It was decided that I have to teach the dances of the central ballet troupe (CS). I started teaching *Ramlila, Holi, Kashmir, Lambardi, Call of the Drum* with a lot of enthusiasm... Simultaneously the rehearsals for *Shahider dak* went on. Benoy became the secretary. We started preparing for traveling all over East Bengal, North Bengal and Assam.' (Reba Roychoudhury, p.27) After Independence 'The line of Indian People's Theatre Association changed. In a general body meeting Hemango Biswas¹⁷⁵ said that till now we were trying to grow our paddy plants but now we have to sow the seeds. The leadership of the IPTA also changed. Shadhna Roychoudhury, Preeti Banerjee, Haripada Kushari, Bhupati Nandi, Sajal Roychoudhury, Mumtaz Ahmed Khan and I formed the P.I.T cell. P.I.T as in IPTA... Even when the party was banned we held meetings at the houses of our close friends...' (ibid, p.34) After getting married to Sajal Roychoudhury another party member in February 1949, she prepared herself for a suicide squad for the Railway Strike which was to happen in March. Anyway, the strike did not happen. For her party activities she was arrested in December 1949 and was finally released in February 1950. Before going to jail she had been working at Ballygunj Sikhsha Sadan but due to her involvement with party work she lost her job. For the elections of 1952, she participated in poster dramas and other agit prop performances. She continued to work with the IPTA in Bengal and later in the 70's the film director Mrinal Sen got Reba and Sajal Roychoudhury to act in his film *Mrigaya*. After this she acted in some more films like *Poroshuram, Maina Tadanta, Dokhol, Par* etc.¹⁷⁶ Preeti Banerjee, in Calcutta, along with party activities and teaching music at the IPTA at North Calcutta, started singing for the All India Radio (AIR) in 1947. She also did playback for films like *Komal Gandhar, Pasher bari, Bor jatri, Kumari mon, Anjanger, Putul Nacher iti kotha* etc. Due to financial constrains she also had to do all sorts of odd jobs like working as a clerk, receptionist etc. In 1948 just after she got married, the party was banned. 'After marriage we (she and her husband) did not have contacts for five years. We had to go underground. Three months after marriage we went to Darjeeling, and the very next day he was arrested by the police... I was in the jail for six months. When after five years the ban was lifted I could meet him.'(in interview with me)

¹⁷⁵ p. 34, *Jibaner Tane Shilper Tane*. Reba Roychoudhury...

¹⁷⁶ Reba Roychoudhury in interview with Khaled Choudhury

Parvati Krishnan continued to work for the CPI and later became the Member of Parliament while Leela Sundarayya who had left the CS by 1946 remained a party member till the end of her life. For all these performers of the CS, the experience of life had changed after the political independence of India. For some, it was a path that followed from the achievement of freedom of the nation for some others this freedom remained 'a lie' and they fought back in the name of the 'party'. But when both 'life and freedom' are seen as opposed to colonial repression as is evident in Nehru's speech they become meanings as against 'struggle and subjugation' within that same colonial context. So there can be a 'struggle for freedom' within that context but the same is not possible after attainment of independence. As 'life' in the *free* state cannot be a struggle but a growth.

If utopia is understood as 'a new earth and a people that does not yet exist'¹⁷⁷ then the 'struggle for freedom' can be understood as the struggle for that utopia – *for a people yet to be and a land yet to exist*. But once it is declared that the struggle has now converted to the 'life' that was being sought, although this might create a momentary awe for that 'life' but at the same time it is the end of the thought of the utopia. In the Marxist sense utopia is the reason for radical change, the kind of change that sweeps all resistances, although the achievement of a radical change is possible which is the revolution, but as Mao suggests contradictions would exist making the sweeping of 'resistances' an eternal process. Therefore, in Marxist thinking utopia cannot exist, life is a continuous struggle towards the thought of the utopia – utopia in that sense is the 'essence' of existence. For people like Shanta Gandhi, Dina Pathak, Gul Bardhan, Ruby Dutt therefore 'struggle' was over after freedom was achieved¹⁷⁸ and 'life' which was a struggle till independence had begun, whereas for some others like Reba Roychoudhury, Preeti Banerjee it continued to remain a struggle for a thought of the utopia – *yet to come*.

¹⁷⁷ p.108, *What is philosophy?*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Columbia University Press, 2003

¹⁷⁸ probably therefore when Gul Bardhan was arrested even after having attempted 'no crime' as such after Independence she gets shocked and writes, '...I had to spend a whole year in jail in *free India*. Morarji Desai was the chief minister of Maharashtra. A big procession was organized to protest against the firing at Sabarmati Jail. I was not in the procession. I was carrying the medical bag and walking beside the procession. Near the police station – I don't know what happened – the police started firing and in a fraction of a second that huge mass of people just disappeared... Somebody said, 'There is an injured person lying in that lane'. I went to help and got arrested. I had to spend one whole year in jail in free India.' (p.43, *What a tremendous movement it was...*, Gul Bardhan)

Nostalgia for the promise: If 'life and freedom' were achievements of an anti-colonial struggle then this achievement as I have argued earlier is an *experiential reality* as well. If reality is to be measured in terms of spatio-temporal existence then the question arises of the existence of the 'temporal'. Paul Ricoeur in his magnum opus 'Time and Narrative' highlights this question from St. Augustine's 'Confessions' and says, 'at stake... is the temporal character of human experience... how time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of narrative; narrative in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience.'¹⁷⁹ Here I would like to make two observations. The first one being through the discussion of the 'aporetic' nature of time as is suggested by Augustine in 'Confessions'. Augustine's enquires begin against the skeptical arguments regarding the 'non-being' of time according to which only something that actually exists can be measured. Time does not exist as the future is not yet, the past is no longer and the present is always passing away which is the skeptical argument. But the force in Augustine's understanding of time as against the theory of its 'non-being' comes from the way human beings talk about time. Augustine explains the nature of this being by presenting a threefold present: the past of the present, the present of the present and the future of the present in forms of 'memory', 'attention' and 'expectation' respectively but according to him this division exists only in the mind. (Ricoeur, p.10-11) Therefore the present of the past things become 'memory', the present of the present is the 'attention' and the present of the future is 'expectation'. Hence time becomes the extension of the mind. In the narratives of the IPTA CS performers, the 'temporal' is thus an extension of this mental negotiation of reality. But the reality of the CS does not hold any 'present of the future' or 'expectation' as this reality in the minds of its performers is already dead. But the narratives of these performers about the CS carry a 'temporality' which is not any linear representation of time. It is rather the 'within- time-ness'¹⁸⁰ where a being engages with time, 'reckons' with it and all measurement becomes a result of this 'reckoning'. The 'within- time-ness' is thus a deepened temporality (or 'authentic temporality') and the

¹⁷⁹ p.3, *Time and Narrative*, Vol.1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984

¹⁸⁰ as borrowed by Ricoeur from Heidegger

narrative through *mimesis*¹⁸¹ tries to grasp the ‘essence’ of reckoning with time that lies at the heart of ‘within-time-ness’. In the narratives of the performers taken long after (the interviews and autobiographies/biographies were taken or written from the 80’s onwards) their minds decreed the existence of CS as dead, what remained living was this ‘within-time-ness’ or the ‘essence’ of the ‘experienced’ reality which lived on or continued existing as a residue. In that sense it is the *existential being of the time*. But the representation of this in the form of narratives of a dead reality comes across as nostalgic articulations of the past that holds no possibility of further movement. For example, talking about the work of the IPTA CS and the cultural programmes preceding the formation of the IPTA Dina Pathak remembers, ‘...*mein usko khaad ka kaam kehti hoon* (I call it the work of fertilizing). This is that work of fertilizing on which today a lot of things are growing. (in interview with Pratibha Agarwal) Rekha Jain recalls, ‘*Central Squad ke pradarshano ki jaise charo aur dhum mach gayi thi* (The performances of the CS had generated great enthusiasm all around). It would have been good if the squad could function for some more time’ (Rekha Jain in *Rangkarm*, p.8) Shanta Gandhi who had actively participated in the formation of a cultural policy under the nation building project, says, ‘The national school is our dream, but NSD’s dream is not a dream of all of us – that we would like to have a national theatre. We do not have a national theatre (the attempt at NSD is to create it). We have Indian theatre – an Indian theatre is composed of theatre in different languages of different regions. What would have been best if it would have been possible at all, may be if the IPTA movement would have continued normally without interruptions for historical reasons, then these regional schools would have already *emerged under the public effort*¹⁸², and then emerging out of that to take it at a higher level, advanced level of training facility, National School of Drama (NSD) could have emerged.’(in interview with Pratibha Agarwal) For all these women the experience of the CS held possibilities. Shanta Gandhi tries to define the ‘event-character’ or the ‘reality’ (as has been discussed earlier) of the CS which Dina Pathak and Rekha Jain allude and relate it to a ‘meaning-character’ or the ‘essence’ of it. She almost describes the possibilities of the CS in the metaphoric sense of an ‘Indian

¹⁸¹ which is a dynamic and creative process of representing the ways human beings reckon with time rather than passive imitation

¹⁸² italics are mine

theatre'. She knows that this 'Indian theatre' is not the theatre of the National School of Drama, as is known in the 1980's when the interview was taken. She uses 'Indian Theatre' as an expression to understand a phenomenon that would incorporate all the languages and cultures within the political geography of India creating a 'communitas'¹⁸³ as it were, whereby an existential togetherness would have been possible. The comments of these CS performers in the 1980's and 90's also make another kind of revelation – a revelation that of the present. By saying what they said, they not only create value for the past which is derived from the 'within-time-ness' but also create a link to the present by 'resurrecting time and place, and a subject *in* time and place'¹⁸⁴ thus shattering the atemporality of existence through a process of 'emplotment' or as Ricoeur suggests through a process of 'schematization' and 'tradition' where 'tradition' is brought about by the interplay of 'sedimentation' and 'innovation' meaning constitution of a paradigm or a grammar at work and the permutation-combination that is brought about by individual work respectively.

The second point I would like to make drawing from Ricoeur is that if a sense of achievement is to freeze 'human time' such that 'life and freedom' becomes triumphal declaration of Power then the 'reality' that seeks 'essence' is bound to collapse leading to nostalgic articulations of the 'within-time-ness' of that reality. As has been pointed earlier the interviews, autobiographies/biographies of these women were taken or written 1984 onwards. India the *free* nation had already seen a state of emergency by then, assassination of its prime ministers, communal violence, regional and linguistic disturbances etc. The cultural policy whereby Hindi came to become a dominant language and hindi cultural dominance over other linguistic cultures met with a lot of criticism. When the interview of Shanta Gandhi was taken in 1988 by Pratibha Agarwal, she was the chairperson of the National School of Drama which was supposed to embody the theatre of India, and Shanta Gandhi readily accepts its failure to do so. On the other hand Preeti Banerjee blames the high handedness of the communist parties for the failure of any cultural movement to take the shape of the movement of the 40's. Both Reba Roychoudhury and Preeti Banerjee think that the ability of PC Joshi to incorporate any one into the movement they had built resulted in the success of the movement. Gul Bardhan feels, 'Though we are doing the same

¹⁸³ the idea of the 'communitas' has been discussed in the previous chapter

¹⁸⁴ p.227, *Nostalgia – A Polemic*, Kathleen Stewart, Cultural Anthropology, Vol.3, No. 3, Aug. 1988

thing even now in our own way – taking untrained people and training them – you don't see that spark in their eyes. Life has changed'.(Gul Bardhan, p.48) But the government of the free nation and today even the communist parties continue to herald the achievement of 'life and freedom' which does not result through any *euphoric* awe that the initial years after 1947 saw but rather often through repressive measures that dictate the existence of this 'life and freedom'! Thus restricting all possibility of the 'temporal' to transpire into 'temporality' or 'within-time-ness'. Hence, especially for the ones who have lived through a 'reality' that held such possibility, in their 'way of struggle' or their 'way of life' what remains is a void, a lack for which a 'resurrection', a 'narrativization', a 'theatricalization' becomes necessary and let me take the risk of naming this 'nostalgia for the particular'¹⁸⁵ as the *Promise*. The IPTA CS held a promise for all these performers – a promise of *freedom*.

The vestiges of an existential community: It was the discovery of the 'transcendental imagination'¹⁸⁶ or a sudden 'thought experience' – the 'essence' of existence that held the promise. This possibility or *promise* shows the existence of the 'limits of the world constituted in subjectivity' that one could transgress in the hope of the *yet to be*, 'sets(ing)-up an empiricism not of impressions or sensations but of (for want of a better word) liberality'¹⁸⁷. We see such 'empiricism' of 'liberality' in the collapsing or transgressing of 'world constituted' 'limits' with the conscious coming into being of the female artist breaking societal norms which I have equated to a revolutionary *Act*. This fracture not only makes the society accept the existence of such an oppressive norm but also generates shame for the 'liberal' society which tries to forget the existence of such an oppressive norm through processes of naturalization. In independent India the articulation of such naturalization happened through the cultural policies of the *free* nation that normalized the situation through the declaration of 'equal' opportunities for men and women in the domain of 'art' and

¹⁸⁵ See 'Nostalgia for the Particular', Iris Murdoch, Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series, Vol.52, (1951-1952)

¹⁸⁶ The expression is borrowed from Peter Fenves who uses the concept of the transcendental imagination of Kant

¹⁸⁷ p.xxv, Fenves, *The Experience of Freedom*, Jean Luc Nancy

'culture'. Thus through the incorporation of these revolutionary women artists within its own ambit of the process of normalization, the state not only tried to make forget the shame of its 'people' but also pacify any further possibility of transgression¹⁸⁸. As I have already mentioned, in post-independence India, most of these women especially those who had accepted the sovereignty of the free state were given such opportunities in the domain of culture by the government and finally this process of normalization killed the possibility of the force of 'liberality' or the 'essence' to *Act* and what remained were the vestiges of the 'within-time-ness' that later got articulated in the paralyzed nostalgic narratives. Whereas those who were not ready to accept its governance, met with state imposed repression.

For women this *promise* of 'essence' that opens up, rather exhausts any *subjectivity*, also holds a gender *free* possibility or a 'liberality' which did not see men as against women. For the IPTA CS performers – the promise of the road to *freedom* held such draining away of their gendered subjectivities. Thus it can be said to have been a promise for *all*, of a *freedom shared equally* whereby the stakes in that promise became higher for the women for whom the 'transcendental imagination' also held the promise of transcending any biopolitical distinction. Borrowing from Fenves who elucidates Hume's understanding of the 'transcendental imagination in Heidegger's reading of Kant' that 'The discovery of the transcendental imagination as the abyssal foundation of self-subsistent subjectivity – as the destitution of essence and the destruction of all traditional bases on which answers to the question 'What is man?' have rested – frees being itself from its determination and comprehension in terms of substantiality, subjectivity, nature, or lawfulness, and this freedom of being communicates itself, each time uniquely, to existence'¹⁸⁹, I would argue here that, this very 'transcendental imagination' at the same time collapses any answers to the question 'What is woman?' freeing it of any 'substantiality, subjectivity, nature, or lawfulness'.

The 'trace' of this thought occurred, which in itself was an experience – a 'thought experience'. In so far as the women of the IPTA CS experienced this 'thought' in their being and carried forward the 'trace' of it, in so far as they believed till the end of 'their (human) time' that the IPTA CS carried the force of such a possibility of

¹⁸⁸ the threat of such transgression is also articulated in the very existence of the Censorship Board and the Dramatic Performance Act in India

¹⁸⁹ p.xxv, Fenves, *The Experience of Freedom*, Jean Luc Nancy

transgression – an utopia as it were, that becomes evident in not only the ‘sedimentation’ but also ‘innovation’ that creates their narratives, these women share a ‘togetherness’ which is ‘timeless’ in its existence making them a *community of being* or an *existential community* in the ‘within-time-ness’ of the ‘past of the present’ or ‘memory’ of the CS, the ‘present of the present’ or ‘attention’ in the CS and after the death of the ‘future of the present’ or ‘expectation’ from the CS. In their togetherness in this ‘thought’ of ‘freedom’ they remain *comrades*.

✍ CONCLUSION

To sum up the main arguments of this research:

- Although the power of political decision-making and administration at higher levels were entirely in the hands of the British, but the introduction of a federal system of government in the colonial subcontinent brought about the emergence of a new social collective that became the representative of the 'new people' of a 'new society'. This social collective in order to be representative of this 'people' in the colonial government felt the need to maintain *personal authority* and *dignity*. This *dignity* was equal to being 'educated' and 'civilized' not only for the individual representative but also for the 'people' which s/he represented.
- As constituent members of the unitary idea of a 'people', women became part of the larger discourse of 'authority' and 'dignity' in the 'new society' and thus was raised the 'women's question'. This 'women's question' was however resolved within a *biopolitical* logic.
- The formation of a national identity resulted from the identification of *difference* in the process of being represented in the colonial dominion and not through any conscious process that was postulated as contradistinctive to the colonial sovereign state.
- The *Act* of violence as well as the *Act* of performance for women became violent dispositions within the apparatus of the state and was driven by the *force* of a 'nostalgia for the future' which was a result of several *conversion(s)* that happened due to variegated experiences resulting from the identification of *difference*.
- The horrors of the Bengal Famine of 1942-43 struck the 'new people' of the 'new society' with shame and anger and a force to deracinate the colonial rule which it found responsible for not only compelling the fracture of the newly founded gender morality but also in forcing the appearance of the *invisibles off the society* in death.

- Within the pervasive anti-colonial ideology of common oppression, a separate socio-political understanding of gender was not possible leaving no space for feminism and thus the women became part of the larger anti-colonial movement as activists.
- The formation of the *Indian People's Theatre Association* and later the *Central Squad* was a result of an awakening called *modernity* which dislodged several 'social' normative disciplines. This dislodgement included the breaking off of the social norm of respected women, not appearing for public performances. With the formation of the IPTA art became strategic at the same time the 'respectability' of women who could be artists was also streamlined, giving a *modernist turn* to the *immediacy* of *modernity*, but nevertheless it carried a 'trace' of the *promise* of that immediacy.
- Under the directive of the Comintern, the Communist movement in India remained nationalist in character. This resulted in the coming together of two contradictory notions of history. For communism, history is a legible succession of fragments of reality whereas nationalism aimed for cultural monumentality. Given that the IPTA CS shared close links with the Communist party, this contradiction got reflected in their performances.
- The success of the IPTA CS performances was a result of the successful 'play' with the audiences' fundamental belief without producing immediate rejection which could be possible due to the contradictions on which the IPTA was built. This resulted in the formation of a *communitas* of the audience who accepted the IPTA CS performances within the larger nationalist discourse.
- Unlike the audience who came together as the 'communitas', the IPTA CS performers could not become an *existential community* thus breaking up.
- For the colonial 'people' the experience of freedom post-independence is both individual and shared. But the idea of freedom in this case is not a revolutionary idea but a *developmental* idea.
- In the wake of the political freedom of the nation, when under the aegis of the Communist Party of India, IPTA adopted the slogan of 'yeh azadi jhoota hai'

or this freedom is a lie – the ‘people’ of the nation felt betrayed which resulted in the IPTA losing out on its popularity. When the CPI realized that the CS had acted as the voice of the same ‘people’, it (CPI) disbanded the CS.

- For the colonial ‘people’ the concept of ‘freedom’ is an idea as against the idea of ‘subjugation’ whereby the removal of the colonial power becomes an achievement. But for the communist, *freedom* is an ongoing process and life is a struggle towards that freedom that the *utopia* holds, which is also the *essence* of existence. The CS which was grounded on these contradictions, after being disbanded saw its members taking two distinct paths – one was towards ‘life’ after political freedom was achieved and the other was towards a ‘struggle’ of life.
- The testimonies of the women performers of the CS taken much after their minds decreed the CS as dead are nostalgic for the *promise* (on the one hand due to government repression and on the other as they were assimilated within the system) that CS held. This was nostalgia for the *essence* which lay in the philosophical idea of *freedom* that promised the dissolution of all subjectivities. In their transcendental imagination of a *free zone*, they remained, nay *remain* together as the comrades.

As is evident by now, this research work does not aim at any historical study of the IPTA CS and the notion of gender within it. Although its subject is the past but it remains conscious of any chronological weaving of events, and names and places associated to those events as several books especially in vernacular languages have been already written on that and have lead to several controversies over the truth of those facts. This has been discussed in the *Introduction* in detail. Although truth remains the concern of this work, but not of specifically any material or factual truth, rather of a *truth of being* of the IPTA CS that made the movement (whereby I refer to the socio-cultural-political) that was IPTA, the movements (whereby I mean the artistic work) of the IPTA and the movements (here I refer to life) from the IPTA possible. In trying to understand these movement(s) not only do the audience, the performers become the witnesses of the IPTA CS but also I, the researcher-author, who have read, interviewed and lived through past moments not as any participant of

such a movement but in the belief that such a movement might have existed, thus witnessing the limits of the *truth* of that *being*. In this truth about the existence of a freedom, a utopia, a *temporality*, I exist with them not as any Indian woman student writing her dissertation in the wake of the twenty-first century but in togetherness of thought. I wonder if the identities of Indian, woman, academic etc. can be completely shed – if in a ‘transcendental imagination’ such a subtraction be possible – so be it. In this work I have only tried to reach out to that possibility beyond identities, holding hands of my comrades of study. ◆

Bibliography

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, Zone Books, New York, 1999
_____. *State of Exception*, The University of Chicago Press, 2003
- Anand, Mahesh. *Rekha Jain*, Rashtriya Natya Vidyalaya, New Delhi, 2010.
- Armitage, David. *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, Cambridge, 2000
- Azmi, Saukat. *Yaad ki Rehguzar*, Rajkamal Prakashan, New Delhi Allahabad Patna, 2006
- Badiou, Alain. *Logics of World: Being and Event II*, Alberto Toscano (trans.), Continuum, 2009.
_____. *Manifesto for Philosophy*, State University of New York Press, 1992
- Baller, E. *Communism and Cultural Heritage*, Progress Publishers, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 1984.
- Banerjee, Sumanta. 'The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta', Seagull Books, 1998
- Bardhan, Gul, (ed.) *Rhythm Incarnate: Tribute to Shanti Bardhan*, Abhinav Publications, 1992
- Beasley, Chris. *What is Feminism?*, Sage Publications Ltd. London, 1999
- Berlanstein, Lenard R. *Daughters of Eve: A Cultural History of French Theatre Women from the regime to the fin de siècle*, Harvard University Press, 2001
- Bharucha, Rustom. *Rehearsals of a Revolution: the political theatre of Bengal*, Seagull, Calcutta, 1983
_____. *The politics of cultural practice: thinking through theatre in an age of globalization*, Oxford India Paperbacks, New Delhi, 2005
- Bhatia, Nandi. *Acts of Authority/Acts of Resistance: theatre and politics in colonial and postcolonial India*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2004
- Bhattacharya, Malini. *Gananatya Andolan O Natyakalar Rupantar Bhabna: 1942-1947*, Pratikshan Publication Pvt Ltd, 1990.
_____. *The Indian People's Theatre Association: A Preliminary Sketch of the Movement and the Organization 1942-47*, Sangeet Natak, 1989

- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*, Routledge, New York, 1999
- Chakraborty, Gargi. *P.C. Joshi: A Biography*, National Book Trust of India, New Delhi, 2007
- Chakraborty, Renu. *Communists in Indian Women's Movement 1940-1950*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1980
- Chakraborty, Uma. *Pandita Ramabai: a life and a time*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2007
- Chatterjee, Partha. *The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus*, Oxford University Press, 1997
- Chatterjee, Sudipto. *The Colonial Staged*; Seagull books; 2007.
- Choudhury, Darshan. *Bangla theatrer itihaas*, Pustak Bipani, Kolkata, 2007
- CPI. *Class Struggle and the Problems of National Unity*, Party Education Series. 3, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Dec. 1996
- _____. *Constitution of the Communist Party of India*, Communist Party Publication, January 1972
- Dasi, Binodini. Chatterjee, Soumitra and Acharya, Nirmalya (ed.). *Amar Katha o onnanno rochona*, Subarnarekha, 1416 (bengali year)
- Davis, Tracy C. *Actresses as working women: their social identity in Victorian culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1991
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, *What is philosophy?*, Colombia University Press, 2003
- Derrida, Jacques. *Demeure: Fiction and testimony*, Stanford University Press, 2000
- Dharwadker, Aparna Bhargava. *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory, and Urban Performances in India since 1947*, Oxford University Press, 2005
- Engel, Fredriech. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, People's Publishing House Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, Dec. 2009
- Fanon, Franz. *The Wretched of the Earth*, Penguin Books, 2001
- Forbes, Geraldine. *Women in Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, 2009
- Foucault, Michel. *Foucault Live: collected interviews, 1961-1984*, Syvère Lotringer (ed.), Semiotext(e), 1996

- _____. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, A.M. Sheridan Smith (trans.); Pantheon Books; New York; 1972
- _____. *The Politics of Truth*, Semiotext(e), 1997
- Fromm, Erich (ed.). *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium*, Anchor Books, New York, 1966
- Gale Maggie B. and John Stokes (ed.). *The Cambridge companion to the Actress*, Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Ghatak, Ritwik. *On the cultural 'front'*, Ritwik Memorial Trust, Calcutta, 2000
- Guha, Ranajit (ed.). *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Oxford India, 1999.
- Habib, Irfan. *Essays in Indian History: towards a Marxist Perspective*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2002
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. (ed.). *The history of Marxism: Marxism in Marx's day*, vol. 1, Select Service Syndicate, New Delhi, 1982
- Joshi P.C. (Junior). *Marxism and Social Revolution in India and other essays*, Patriot Publishers, New Delhi, 1986
- Joshi, Puran Chandra. *For the Final Bid for Power! : The Communist Plan Explained*, People's Publishing House, Bombay
- _____. (ed.). *A dedicated and Creative Life*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 1974
- Kak, Shakti and Biswamoy Pati (ed.). *Exploring Gender Equations: Colonial and Postcolonial India*; Nehru Memorial Museum and Library; 2005.
- Kalekar, Hiranmay (ed.). *Independent India: The first fifty years*; OUP Delhi; 1998.
- Kapur, Geeta *When was modernism: essays on contemporary cultural practice in India*, Tulika Books, 2000
- Kersaw, Baz *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, Routledge, London and New York, 1992
- _____. *Theatre ecology: environments and performance events*, Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Khokar, Mohan. *His dance, his life: A portrait of Uday Shankar*, Himalayan Books, New Delhi, 1983.

- Lukacs, Georg. *History and class consciousness: studies in Marxist dialectics*, Merlin Press Ltd., 1971
- Luxemburg, Rosa. *The National Question: Selected Writings*, Aakar Books, Delhi, 2009
- Majumdar, Neepa. *Wanted cultured ladies only! Female stardom and cinema in India, 1930's-1950's*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 2009
- Marcuse, Herbert. *Soviet Marxism: A critical analysis*, Penguin Books, England, 1958
- Marx, Karl and F. Engels. *On Colonialism*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (date of publishing not given)
- _____. *The Manifesto of the Communist Party in Selected Works*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1951.
- McClintock Anne, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat (ed.). *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*; University of Minnesota Press; 2004
- McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and sexuality in the colonial context*, Routledge, New York and London, 1995.
- McNay, Lois. *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social theory*, Polity Press, 2000.
- Munshi, Vidya. *In Retrospect: War-time Memories and Thoughts on Women's Movement*, Manisha, 2006
- Nancy, Jean Luc. *The Experience of Freedom*, Stanford University Press, California, 1993.
- Negri, Antonio and Michael Hardt. *Empire*, Harvard University Press, London, 2000
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Letters: from a father to his daughter*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006.
- _____. *Soviet Russia: some random sketches and impressions*, Chetana, 1949
- Padia, Chandrakala and Saxena, SK (ed.). *Feminism, Tradition and Modernity*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2002
- Pantham, Thomas and Deutsch, Kenneth L. (ed.). *Political Thought in Modern India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi; 1986

- Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked the politics of performance*, Routledge; London and New York; 2001
- Pradhan, Sudhi (ed.). *Marxist Cultural Movement in India: Chronicles and Documents (1936-1947)*, National Book Agency Pvt Ltd. July 1979
- Ranci re, Jacques. *The politics of aesthetics: the distribution of the sensible*, Gabriel Rockhill (trans.), Continuum, 2004.
- Ray, Nisith Ranjan and others (ed.), *Challenge: A saga of India's struggle for freedom*, PPH, Jan, 1984
- Reinelt Janelle G. and Joseph R. Roach (ed.), *Critical theory and performance*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2005
- Riceour, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, Vol.1, Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (trans.), University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984
- Rolland, Romain. *People's Theatre*, Rathin Chakraborty (trans. & ed.), Natyachinta Foundation Trust, Kolkata, 2006.
- Roychoudhury, Sajal. *Gananatya Katha*, Mitra and Ghosh Publishers Pvt Ltd, Kolkata, 1990
- Sangari Kumkum and Sudesh Vaid (ed.). *Recasting Women: Essays in colonial history*, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2009.
- Sarkar, Sumit. *A critique of Colonial India*, Papyrus, 1985
- _____. *Modern India 1885-1947*, Macmillan India Ltd. 2006
- _____. *Writing social history*, Oxford India Paperbacks, 2009.
- Sartre, Jean Paul. *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, Routledge, London and New York, 2001.
- Schmitt, Carl. *The Concept of Representation*, University of California Press, London, 1967
- Schwartz, Vanessa R. *Spectacular Realities: early mass culture in fin-de-si cle Paris*, University of California Press, 1999.
- Sen, Manikuntala *Sediner Kotha*, Nabapatra Prakashan, Kolkata, 2003.
- Shankar, Ravi. *Raag Anuraag*, Ananda, Dec 2006
- Tagore, Rabindranath. *Char Odhay*, Vishwabharati Grantha Bibhag, Kolkata, 1809 (Bengali year)

- Tse-tung, Mao. *On Contradiction*, International Publishers, 1953
- Turner Victor W. and Edward M. Bruner (ed.). *The Anthropology of Experience*,
University of Illinois Press, 1986.
- Turner, Victor. *From Ritual to Theatre*, Performing Arts Journal Pub., New York,
1982
- Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Oxford
University Press, New York, 1983
- _____. *The Politics of Modernism*, Verso, 1989
- Woolf, Virginia. *Three Guineas*, A Harvest Book, Harcourt Inc., 1966.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. *Gender and Nation*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1997

Newspapers, Magazines, Presentations

Anushtup. *Charer doshok: uttal shomoy*; Dhruv Gupta, vol.4, ed. Anil Acharya, 1988;

Cholar Pothey. *Vimala Dang – ek jibanbyapi shangrami* by Amarjeet Kaur and
Bharate Nari Jagaran by Bandana Bhattacharya, year. 38, vol. 2, June
2009

Cultural Anthropology. *Nostalgia – A Polemic*, Kathleen Stewart, Vol.3, No. 3, Aug.
1988

Economic and Political Weekly. *Birth of a Goddess: ‘Vande Mataram’, Anandamath
and Hindu Nationhood*, Tanika Sarkar, Sept 16, 2006

Epic Theatre. *Bharatiya Ganantya Sangher Itihash*, Niranjan Sen, (April-May 1978
to January 1979)

_____. *Bharatiya Ganantya Shangher Itihas*, Niranjan Sen, August 1978

Ganantya. *Bharater Marxbadi Sanskriti Andolaner Prothom Joog*, Sudhi Pradhan,
Dec 1989

_____. *Ganantya sangho o Uday Shankar*’, Sudhi Pradhan, October 1977

Group Theatre. *Chollish doshoker Ganantya Andolaner Mahila Shilpi*, Sajal
Roychoudhury, April 1988

Indian Express. *In interview with Iqbal Masud*, Bombay, 6 June 1992

Journal of the History Of Ideas. *Carl Schmitt’s Political theory of Representation*,
Duncan Kelly Vol.65, No. 1, Jan 2004

People’s Age. *IPTA Central Dance Troupe’s Programme and Tour*, Balraj Sahni,
Sunday, Jan 13, 1946

Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society. *‘Nostalgia for the Particular’*, Iris Murdoch,
New Series, Vol.52, (1951-1952)

Rangkarm 2006- the annual magazine of IPTA Raigarh. *Nemiji ke sath mera
natyanubhav*, Rekha Jain, 2006

Seagull Theatre Quarterly. *What a tremendous movement it was...*, Gul Bardhan,
Issue 7, October 1995

The Hindu. *Parvathi Krishnan* in interview with M. Allirajan and Subha J Rao,
January 13, 2003

Theatre India: National School of Drama’s Theatre Journal. *‘Women that men
created’* by Maya Pandit, Kinnari Vohra, A. Mangai, Dilip Kumar Basu,

Catharine Thankamma and Paramita Banerjee; '*In search of new roles*' by Malini Bhattacharya, in, no. 2, Nov. 2000

Theory in Humanistic Studies. *Literary History and Literary Modernity*), Paul de Man, Daedalus, Vol.99, No.2, (Spring, 1970)

Warwick- JNU Colloquium - March 31 to April 2, 2010. '*Political Sociability and theatre in the subcontinent: The poverty of appearance, appearance of poverty...*' Soumyabrata Choudhury

14th PC Joshi Memorial Lecture. '*Sunil Janah, Photographer and PC Joshi: the Making of a Progressive Culture*', Ram Rehman, 2010

Websites

<http://www.aryasamaj.org/newsite/node/721>

http://www.harmonyindia.org/hportal/VirtualPageView.jsp?page_id=4975

http://www.lacan.com/essays/?page_id=126

Interviews

2010, 13th May. *PC Joshi (junior)* interviewed by me in New Delhi

2010, 4th May and 15th March 2009. *Preeti Banerjee* interviewed by me at Kolkata

2009, 14th August. *Pratibha Agarwal* interviewed by me at Natyashodh, Kolkata

2009, 14th August. *Vidya Munshi* and *Sunil Munshi* interviewed by me at Kolkata

2009, March. *Sova Sen* interviewed by me at Kolkata

1988, 14th January. *Dina Pathak* interviewed by Pratibha Agarwal at Natyashodh,
Kolkata *

1986, 4th October. *Rekha Jain* interviewed by Pratibha Agarwal *

1984, 28th August. *Santa Gandhi* interviewed by Pratibha Agarwal on at Natyashodh,
Kolkata*

(date not provided) *Reba Roychoudhury* interviewed by Khaled Choudhury at
Natyashodh Kolkata *

*interviews courtesy *Natyashodh Sansthan*, Kolkata