

THE PHANTOM OF TRANSGRESSIVE AESTHETICS

&

MISSED POSSIBILITIES

A STUDY OF POLITICAL THEATRE IN ALLAHABAD: 1975-1985

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University

in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the award of the Degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

ANIRBAN KUMAR



SCHOOL OF ARTS AND AESTHETICS

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

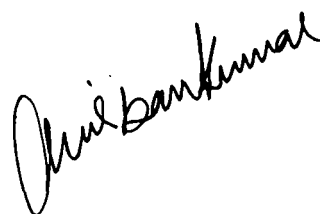
NEW DELHI-110067

INDIA

2013

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation titled, *The Phantom of Transgressive Aesthetics & Missed Possibilities – A Study of Political Theatre in Allahabad: 1975-1985*, 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.


Anirban Kumar

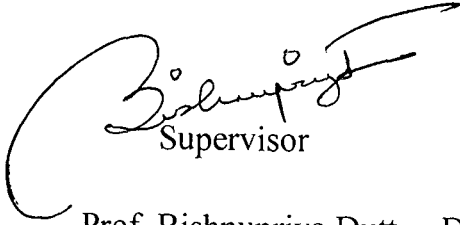


कला एवं सौन्दर्य शास्त्र संस्थान
School of Arts & Aesthetics
जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
नई दिल्ली-110067, भारत / New Delhi - 110067, India

Ph.: 26742976, 26704061, 26704177
E-mail : aesthete@mail.jnu.ac.in

CERTIFICATE

It is certified that the dissertation titled, *The Phantom of Transgressive Aesthetics & Missed Possibilities – A Study of Political Theatre in Allahabad: 1975-1985* submitted by Anirban Kumar is in partial fulfilment 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 his own work. We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


Supervisor

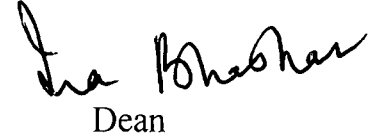
Prof. Bishnupriya Dutt

SAA, J.N.U.


Co-Supervisor

Dr. Ameet Parameswaran

SAA, J.N.U.


Dean

Prof. Ira Bhaskar

SAA, J.N.U.



Prof. Ira Bhaskar
Dean
School of Arts & Aesthetics
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the spirit of this work, I'm convinced that acknowledging everybody is im-possible. But then the drive of im-possibility is far from being sceptical or cynical, so I might acknowledge only few of those people, who are not the exceptions but are just indiscernible from this work.

There is no argument that Prof. Bishnupriya Dutt as my Guide has made every possible effort to not only see through this dissertation, but has also bestowed upon us, abundance of her Desdemonian appreciation and affection. Her Bakhtinian subversion of our polemics always made our world, ours theatre through performance. And this theatre had tons of food. I can't simply use the word thanks for my co-supervisor Dr. Ameet Parameswaran, whose camaraderie has never kept me alone in my academic anxieties, enquiries and inquisitiveness. Being facing the brunt of my incoherent and most of the time strident thoughts, his indicative guidance has provided this vignette of writing. And how can I forget to thank you once more – cigarettes. I would like to take this opportunity to genuinely extend my acknowledgement to Dr. Trina Nileena Banerjee, whose reverberating syllabus has precisely punched in with Dr. Ameet Parameswaran's indivisible contribution in this thesis. Dr. Urmimala Sarkar has always been an encouraging, supportive and self-reflexive persona since my years at the post-graduation level. Prof. H S Shiva Prakash, for giving me the liberty to keep my faith in class-less society (for not attending his classes). He with Prof. Dare Clubb in our first semester of M.A. made it sure that for the rest of our four semesters, we would bunk other classes to attend theatre workshops and do nothing else other than that. I would like to thank Samik Sir for his classes on Habermas, discussions on the discourse of public and private sphere and for sharing the rare materials on Parsi Theatre and IPTA. Dr. Soumyabrat Choudhury, for not only opening up world theatre in front of us, but also offering us to philosophize our own life by simply listening to us.

Among other people, particularly those who have helped me tremendously with my field work and interviews need to come here. I would extend my gratitude to Mukhtar Ahmad and Kaushal Kishore for giving me anecdotal and nuanced insights about the cultural front of their era. Naseem Ansari, for establishing the initial contacts with people related to IPTA. Prof. Sachin Tewari, who logically convinced me about my objective in this project; talking to him about his monthly magazine *Campus*, other literary writings, also came in our discussion which has helped me immensely. A veteran in his own way, I would thank Zia-ul Haq for sharing his thoughts on communist ideology and often forgotten positions taken by C.P.I, in the '40's. Once with the undivided communist party of India, G.P. Singh explained about his involvement in students' politics during the Naxalbari movement. I would also like to thank Moloysree Hashmi for telling her experience when they had visited parts of Uttar Pradesh. Ajeet Bahadur, K.K. Pandey for ensuring that I don't revert from my project in lieu of unavailability of DASTA's text of plays. Other than providing the texts of the plays, his assurance to help me in whatever way he can, from his otherwise busy schedule was more than enough. Pankaj Srivastav, who not only made himself available for the interview but also took a keen interest in my work and following it up with excavating his personal diaries and vestiges of his young days. I thank Nandal Hitaeshi, for generously listening to me while intercutting with his poetic interludes at the appropriate moment while I was recording his interview. Surendra Ji who looks after the P.C. Joshi Archive, was cooperative in giving me access to the archive. I thank Prof. Sanjay Dutta Roy, Prof. Sanjay Saxena, Rakesh Sir, Veda ma'm, Anupam Anand, Padma Singh, Neelkant Ji, Anil R. Bhoumick, Harish uncle, Ajamil, Utpala Malviya, Sanjay, Babulal Bhawra, Dr. Badri Narayan, Parvez Bhai, for generally hearing me out and assisting to a great extent. Even more than that, I must be obliged to them because of their pumped-up responses.

Fontu, for keeping me *high* on Lucknow roads – from outer city till Kaisar Baag, delights of Tunday kebabi and Hukkas. Pishi and Pisham, for giving me shelter and food at their house, without a return complaint-call back at home

Rishi, Jay and their families for not treating me as a guest (more like a part of their family)
Rishi again for his expertise on camera movement, lights and aesthetics during interviews at Lucknow; credits to his rare amateurish exploration, before he becomes *director saheb*

Friends during my short stint at graduation & post-graduation level – Saurabh (li-bareli), Ranjan (Jumman), Ashok (Jaat), Imraan (Lapka), Praneet (Boka), Hemant (Baaga), Abhineet (Bhaiyaa), Sarfaraz (Don), Amit, Satya (Tatya), Baishya (not the Bengali Anirban), Shruti, Anannya, have always made me feel special.

This one line of acknowledgement is for my five consecutive roommates at Lohit Hostel

Among other friends – Maa, Papa, Mama, Rupam, Didi, Rishi, Sharmishta, Arnab (ADB), Masih, CSBS, Rishabh, Puja, Nikhil, Satya, Vibhuti, Rojio, Raja, Renu, Anubhuti, Rajdeep, Suchetana, Dwaipayan, Diksha, Tanvi, Rajat and Robin, have kept me alive in my dire situations at various phases, in the past 8 years...

Choti and Tariq, for sharing some remarkable moments of our days, both inside and outside JNU – guitar sessions, couple-scuffle, bucket vomits, international cuisines, and udthi chiryaa...

Soumick hasn't been of any help – for not carrying my suitcase (that he claims, he did); for choosing the same optional courses; for chatofying me after his films, books and break-up excursions; for ditching me at crucial junctures. “c'est la vie...”

Som, for keeping-up with the “tunning, planning, setting and melancholia”

From organizational comrade to comrades in life; Parijat, “hum tumko lubloo karta hai”

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations

Introduction	1
CHAPTER I: Habits in Waiting: Theatre of the State and Transgression	18-45
Hindu Nationalism and its Corporeality: Waiting for <i>Nothing</i>	19
Apotheosis: Lucky at the service of Pozzo	27
Andher Nagri: Novelty of Representation	31
“Illegal” Transgressions	37
CHAPTER II: Stretching the Order of Limits: Performing Bodies of Non-Belonging	46-70
Spatial Practices in the time of Emergency: An Analysis of <i>Vande Mataram</i>	48
‘Freeing’ the Body in a Mechanized World: Human-Robot in Machine	54
Gendered Work and <i>Value of Strike</i> : Linking Blockages in Production	62
CHAPTER III: Political Theatre in <i>Now Time</i>: Missed Possibilities in Transgressions	71-97
Sangam and its Contradiction	74
DASTA and the Framework of ‘Larger’ Politics	77
Agit-Prop and the Fusing of Art/Life	81
(Im)Possibility of Fulfilment in Political Theatre	88
Conclusion	98
Bibliography	103
Newspaper, Magazines	107
Interviews	107
Websites	108

List of Illustrations

Fig (I) Photograph of members of DASTA, *Singing a song while standing*, Undated. Photo credits, Anonymous. Retrieved from Personal Album of Pankaj Srivastav (New Delhi, 2013) P- 71

Fig (II) Photograph of members of DASTA, *Singing a song while walking down the alley*, Undated. Photo credits, Anonymous. Retrieved from Personal Album of Pankaj Srivastav (New Delhi, 2013) P- 71

INTRODUCTION

This M. Phil dissertation, will explore the political theatre *practice* in Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh from 1975 to 1985. The rationale for such an endeavor is that firstly, there has not been a single study which neither falls into a sympathetic syndrome of political theatre activism nor in the dungeons of ill-informed diatribes. This work focuses on the spectrum of issues within which the theatre groups were performing and objectively analyze the strict parameters of political theatre. My research purpose for the above mentioned time and topic will be basically guided by the events which were unfolding during that period – split within the Indian National Congress¹, Naxalbari agitation², war in 1971, subsequent declaration of National Emergency in the backdrop of 1971 war, agitation in Bihar lead by Jayaprakash Narayan³ and finally *the* Emergency⁴ declared on 26 June, 1975. In this build-up, the time

¹ See, *The Congress in India-Crisis and Split*. Robert L. Hardgrave Jr. mentions, "In November 1969, the Congress party of India was torn apart after four months of inner-party conflict. The truncated leadership of the party organization, isolating itself from the will of the majority of the Congress Parliamentary Party, expelled Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, daughter of Nehru, from the Congress." This inner party conflict was basically in terms of differences between the governmental and organizational constituent factions of the Indian National Congress. After Nehru's death, the 'Syndicate' as they were known, came at the forefront to run the government while maintain the state of organization power among them.

² Located in the northern part of the State of West Bengal, Naxalbari village comes under the purview of Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling district. Covering a piece on Naxalbari for *Frontline*, Venkitesh Ramakrishnan quotes from the editorial of *People's Daily* dated July 5, 1967, "A peal of spring thunder has crashed over the land of India." See *Frontline*, "The Road from Naxalbari", Vol. 22-Issue 21, 2005. *People's Daily* is the organ of Communist Party of China which summarized the violent peasant uprising against the oppression perpetrated by landlords in the area of Naxalbari on May 25, 1967, concluded by setting the tone as "a single spark can start a prairie fire".

³ Jayaprakash Narayan was a freedom fighter, political philosopher-leader, civil rights activist and became one of the leading figures during the period of Emergency. See, *Emergency Excesses and Day Light Robbery of Human Rights and JP-The Saviour*. Popularly known as JP, he established the Socialist Party in 1948 but withdrew from the prioritization of parliamentary politics. Dr. Janak Raj Jai writes in this book, "Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan was the first person who gave a call for total revolution. By 1973 JP could foresee the impact of steady economic deterioration in the country...Speaking in Kanpur, JP told the audience that he was able to look ahead and see that, 'there is another 1942 in sight to change the course of history'..." (p-1) Among other authors, Sunanda K Datta-Ray formulates, "but realizing the limitations of parliamentary democracy in India, JP joined Vinoba Bhawe and spent the next 20 years 'searching for some other way'..." Sunanda K Datta-Ray. "Inconvenient Prophet-Jayaprakash Narayan," *100 people who shaped India*, 2009.

period will also take into account the run-up years of theatre practice to 1975 and those following in the years after 1985, roughly around 1986.

These political theatre *practices* were taking place in the background of such events and in the region of Allahabad with respect to independent India's political history. On the one hand, there were layers of ripple, conjured up through the simultaneous agitations, and on the other, India's *tumultuous electoral democracy* was going to be shaken under the garb of Emergency. In the context of Allahabad as a region, the Allahabad High Court Judgment of 12 June 1975 given by Justice Jagmohanlal Sinha in the case – State of Uttar Pradesh vs. Raj Narain became one of the focal points in the run-up to the declaration of Emergency. The High Court found Mrs. Indira Gandhi guilty of corruption for electoral malpractice, including the misuse of government machinery for her campaign process and barred her from contesting in parliamentary elections for the next six years⁵. Even though, one National Emergency was already in effect because of the 1971 war, the one declared on 26 June, 1975 drew its governmental legitimacy on the controversial ground of “internal disturbances”. Concomitant to this were the sites of state institutions – universities, colleges, public offices, parks etc., where the resentment against the government were being channelized through active public participation. Political theatre done both on proscenium and/or street in the region of Allahabad was one among many of these participatory platforms. One of these forums was All India Short Play Competition which was annually organized at Allahabad.

<<http://web.archive.org/web/20090131114958/http://indiatodaygroup.com/itoday/millennium/100people/narayan.html>>, accessed on 27/07/2013

⁴ Often termed as *the Emergency* in India the *Constitution of India* in Part XVIII under Article 352 lays down the provision for the ‘Proclamation of Emergency’ – “If the President is satisfied that a grave emergency exists whereby the security of India or of any part of the territory thereof is threatened, whether by war or external aggression or 1[armed rebellion], he may, by Proclamation, make a declaration to that effect 2[in respect of the whole of India or of such part of the territory thereof as may be specified in the Proclamation]. Here 1 stands for Forty-fourth Amendment of 1978, which substituted the previous terminology of “internal disturbances” and 2 represents the Forty-second Amendment of 1976 which was inserted and became a law w.e.f. 3-1-1977. For further reference, See *Constitution of India*, p-218.

⁵ “Rightists make Allahabad Judgement Their Weapon,” *New Age*, Vol. XXIII No. 24, 1975, p-9

Both Kaushal Kishore and Prof. Sanjay Datta Roy corroborate about this annual function. Working with IPTA at that point of time Kaushal Kishore gives an insightful remark saying, “after the declaration of Emergency, the competition was not stopped and that year, more political plays were invited. We performed *Afeem ke Phool*⁶ in the short play competition.”⁷ If then political theatre was not restricted to streets but also mediated by state institutionalization, I will look at these performances during the period of Emergency will challenge the conventional notion of a *grand narrative* of crackdown and try to understand how political theatre worked in the complex socio-political fabric. At the same time it is also not a case that reports of crackdown by the executive machinery of the State were myths but my main emphasis is on countering the *encapsulated aura* of Emergency.

Not to deny the fact that I will also have to go through a repugnant process of selecting and omitting; I will have to limit myself to only a few number of dramatic texts like, *Afeem Ke Phool*, *Vande Mataram* produced under the IPTA front; *Machine* and *Aurat*, both being conceptualized and originally written by the members of the Jan Natya Manch (JANAM) ranging from 1978 to mid 1980’s; *Hum Na Sahenge Zor Kisika*, *Shahar Khamosh Nahi* performed under the banner of DASTA.

If we see from IPTA’s legacy, the manifestos and scattered materials of the Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA), constituted the performance-focused armrest of the nationalist Progressive Writer’s Association (PWA) of early post-independent India. In order to address a wide public, and particularly the vast *illiterate* population of India at that time, IPTA formed local theatre groups throughout India, each charged with producing theatre in local forms to educate the people about the nationalist movement. (Sehgal, 1998: 34)

⁶ *Afeem ke Phool* is a short play written by Radheshyam. It was performed several times, even before the Emergency but became an iconic play during the years of Emergency.

⁷ Personal interview with Kaushal Kishore on 4 July 2012

Whereas the goal of IPTA had concentrated on the politicization of local idioms of theatre, JANAM and DASTA radically involved the spectator in the theatre as either agents of performance or critical observers. Political theatre performances then only evolve out of an effort that joins political theatre groups and audiences as a collective, materialized (however ephemeral) as something that exceeds our *knowledge*. This moment of performance, then, refigures (through the novelty that it introduces) the boundaries of community as being pliable and contested. This statement would seem to lead us back to the same predicament and the tension between the universal and the particular. On the one hand, the political power of street performance is that, through its refusal of the conventions of role-playing and its active rejection of the authority of representation, it reveals the universal content of social issues – nuanced, as empty and always subject to re-configuration. Such oppositionality hinges on the artists' knowledge and consciousness of the present; focus on the present offers critical perspective on national histories, without inscribing an alternative, dominant history.

Political Theatre & Questions of Memory

Criticality will be certainly behind the drive of this work but it is also crucial to summarize the precise yet pliable literature that is primarily or/and secondarily related with my area of research. In order to elaborate on the following sections, it is necessary for me to argue that an understanding of the various types of available discursive patterns on political theatre is imperative. To lay-out the chart of political theatre, Erwin Piscator's definition of political theatre would be my starting premise; leading onto an exposition with the argument that instead of a direct doctrinarian approach of Piscatorian or Brechtian technique, these local political theatre groups were creating something affirmative which was unique in their own condition. This choice is necessitated through my field work experience, around the political upheaval during the times of Emergency and their performative resonance. Here it is crucial

to identify these parameters of political theatre as far as they are relevant to my material. To that extent I have divided the literature into three groups based on their thematic and critical orientation. (Being conscious of their overlapping nature this attempt is merely schematic)

1. Literature around theatre which seeks to understand political theatre through its oppositional and at times antagonistic expression vis-à-vis the state or any such dominant normative orders.
2. Literature which investigates the nature of political theatre through its logic of interruption to determined discursive modes. Here an interruptive mode should be distinguished from an oppositional mode in so far as these literatures try to investigate the various theatrical idioms through which certain theatrical modalities seek to expose and creatively subvert existent modes of representation.
3. Literature which looks at theatre as a process which both in itself and through its operation tries to expose the possibility of transformation.

Formulating a schema will tantamount to a more definitive portion for my current work. It would be rather more productive to keep it in a sense of trepidation – not as abstruse but that of curiosity. Concentrating within my area, which has to do a lot with interviews, memory of these individuals as practitioners/activists will certainly be a foci, but moreover as a method to access various other archives Through this, my aim has been to explicitly direct towards those incidents of performance which were trying to recreate representation on stage or on streets. Using these interviews as reference points, I will inevitably cater them as ‘truth’ but only to maximise my point of referring them through situation, not at situation. As I will proceed, contestation within these oral memories will certainly come up which can further open up different situations. But from the onset of this work it will not be a work on contestation of memory – indicating that ‘truth’ is all but evasive.

Emergency as Exception & Rule

My emphasis on giving a panoptical view of a pre-Emergency period (*Waiting for Godot* and *Andher Nagri*) comes from a position which also maintains that a dynamic understanding of historical events must not be simply despised because of the logic of *progress* that sees the past as vestiges only to act for impediment against progression. In such a context, Emergency will undoubtedly have to be a constant referral point. Given the limitation of archival material on Emergency, what has been accessible in terms of studies related with Emergency, majorly comprise of national daily editorials, governments clarification on programmes commenced through booklets, speeches, pamphlets; individual writings – diary entries, memoirs, personal experience; popular cultures response to Emergency through rare small budget films, poetry, books and compilation of short literary pieces written during or after Emergency. Kuldeep Nayar whose work on Emergency in his two books – *The Judgement: Inside Story of the Emergency in India* and *Emergency Retold* still remains to be one of the most ground-breaking work in terms of narration and vivid description. At a recent public gathering to re-release his book *Emergency Retold*, Mr. Nayar expressed that public offices and institutions were taken for a ride during the period of Emergency and has still not been able to overcome that dent⁸.

On a different plane, Sajal Basu articulates about rumours that the authenticity and legitimacy of news per se became something which was already pre-mediated, since news in itself was so rare that people had to believe whatever was reaching at their ears. He goes on to say, “in

⁸ See, “Institutions destroyed during Emergency: must be revived: Kuldip Nayar,” *Firstpost*, 29 June, 2013, <<http://www.firstpost.com/fwire/institutions-destroyed-during-emergency-must-be-revived-kuldip-nayar-914799.html>>, (19 July 2013).

fact, the Emergency solemnised the role of rumour in public life.”⁹ These lines not only explicate the rigour of these underground movements but also accentuate a phenomenon – clearly putting forward a sense of ‘truth value’ which were innate in their very conception. Amiya Rao & B.G. Rao, gives us a keen insight into this discourse concerning around the *truth quotient* – “It was only after the Turkman Gate tragedy that both of us decided that a serious effort should be made to produce a news bulletin giving at least some genuine, uncensored news items....With the material thus available we produced on May 1, 1976 a newsheet in 18 copies. We called it ‘Satyasamachar’ (True news). On May 15 we produced the second number.... Our emphasis was on the ‘satya’ (truth) of the ‘samachar’ (news): The emphasis will always be on truth. Our self-imposed code will forbid incitement to violence, to communal passions and to anti-social behaviour; we will scrupulously avoid character assassination and tendentious writing; our constant endeavour will be to remind people that a personal dictatorship is working to perpetuate itself and that they have to fight it.”¹⁰ Much to do, about this above quoted text is to sense that knowledge of ‘being betrayed’, ‘individual rights being curtailed’ and the binary of domination, that of between ‘oppressor and oppressed’ (in this case, State and its Subject); clearly depositing and prescribing, what all should not be done.

Thrashing out this debate between “should and should not”, I would like to emphasize – does the State goad violence, communal passions gives a free hand to the police, operates high-handedly, fussily does character assassination or censors news reports only in a situation like

⁹ Sajal Basu, *Underground Literature during Indian Emergency* (Kolkata: MINERVA ASSOCIATES [PUBLICATIONS] PVT.LTD 7-B, LAKE PLACE, 1978), Preface

¹⁰ *The Pen in Revolt – Souvenir: Underground Literature Published during Emergency*, organized as Exhibition in Calcutta and New Delhi. Altogether around two thousand items were on display in AIFACS hall, New Delhi, between 16-19 April, 1978

Emergency? Amiya and B.G. Rao contemplate, “What happened in one neighbourhood could not be known to people living just five miles away. Thus, the happenings in Turkman Gate, we found, were not known to our friends in Defence Colony even three months later. In such circumstances two human traits asserted themselves to fill the vacuum created by the pusillanimous behaviour of our Press – a desire to spread news and a desire to hit back at the oppressor with whatever weapon one could.”¹¹

Herein, it is imperative for us to understand and grapple more with this thought of “a desire to spread news and hit back at the oppressor”, which is not simply evolving through a process or derives its logical fallout from a cause like Emergency being imposed/implemented which leads to censorship and thus provokes this desire of refusal of any sort of directive. On the contrary, I would argue that a situation like Emergency, unfurls a declaration of power which shouts-out loudly, to tell its people about the conspicuous affair of anarchy, which the State can no longer mitigate; though, leasing itself at the supreme command but concomitantly throwing up a new situation – a vacuum.

Problems of ‘Presenting’ the Past – A New Methodology

Rather than avoiding the discourse of memory and its relation with history, my endeavour is to stumble on new methodological possibilities to open up the existing boundaries of blind-fold generalizations regarding theatre history. What is necessary to sharply point out is that my objective is not to write an alternate history or place a happening of *this and that*. On the contrary, my aim will not digress from invoking such events as reference points in order to

¹¹ The Pen in Revolt – Souvenir: Underground Literature Published during Emergency, organized as Exhibition in Calcutta and New Delhi. Altogether around two thousand items were on display in AIFACS hall, New Delhi, between 16-19 April, 1978

facilitate and channelize my thoughts into words. The period from 1975-85 will guide me to look primarily into the productions of theatre groups – Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA), Jan Natya Manch (JANAM) and DASTA; critically looking into the modus-operandi in a historical context rather than the historicity, which till now have been referred as a glorious past.

Thus at certain level in the dissertation I have brought in play texts to explicate my points of departure – dialogues between Daadu and Peelu in *Afeem ke Phool* which connects an interlinking duration within Emergency to the figure of hanging bodies and *spatial practices* in *Vande Mataram*. Whereas at other instances, I have used writings of theatre director like Dr. Satyabrata Sinha’s edited work of Dr. Anupam Anand in *Hindi Rangkarm ke Amrit Putra: Dr Satyabrata Sinha* to link up the theatrical performance of *Waiting for Godot* with Dr. Sinha’s critique of RSS’s ideology. In a similar manner, Arjun Ghosh’s book *A History of the Jana Natya Manch: Plays for the People* and writings on Safdar Hashmi have be put forth to investigate through moments of *strike* in the text of *Aurat*; performance studies tool of *becoming* through the creation of different planes of bodies in *Machine*. While dealing with the performances of DASTA, I have extensively used interviews of group members, to bring up issues of performing their own politics within the socio-political mooring in the region of Allahabad and that too confronting the communal riots.

As my research has widened up through on field experience and material information, it will also acknowledge the efficacy of those plays which were performed by both organized and *unorganized* cultural groups. By *unorganized* cultural group it should be clarified that I am basically thinking in terms of those groups which were never given a clear mandate for their modus operandi by their respective parent organization or even a protocol to work under a

specific banner. As a case in point, Kaushal Kishore comments “we initially started doing plays with a philanthropic motive, I joined IPTA after doing five six plays”¹².

Temporary Transgression & Minute Missed – The Phantom

My intervention will be invested in exploring these performances within their political idiom, language and choice of aesthetic representation. As I have stated earlier, that it must not only be a paradigmatic analysis of texts, where a section of the text is analysed so as to fill in one’s theoretical assertion rather, it has to go hand in hand with the larger dynamics which is at work. Saying so, it must be clarified that I am not envisaging a description of these performances, pages after pages. But yes the form and content needs to be seen in a more intertwined sense, as it cannot be separated from each other into two different entities. Since many of these performances were simultaneously happening both on proscenium and street, its aesthetic in terms of representation was nevertheless different from both, the written text and spatial transformation (stage and street).

To support my point, in the production of *Vande Mataram* done by IPTA, Mukhtar Bhai who was one of the actors, recollects about the spectacle they tried to create – “two people, which included me and one more actor would only rehearse to hang ourselves; there were two ropes, one which was visible from the front side where the audience was sitting and another one was tied to a makeshift plank of soft pads, on which we could rest our back. When the lights would come from the front, our audience could only see one rope”¹³. Keeping in mind the technical aspect of this act, one could gauge that it’s only possible in a closed space, where the rope can be tied to a beam of rod or something which can withhold both the ropes. What it did manage to pull-up was the spectacle deliberated through two hanging bodies, suspended

¹² Personal interview with Kaushal Kishore 4 July 2012

¹³ Personal interview with Mukhtar Ahmad on 14 June, 2012

in mid-air throughout the narrative of the play. Nonetheless, the spectacle in itself was indicating a reference to the martyrs who were hanged but also tried to transgress the meaning of hanging body by the act of doing it in a theatrical space.

My interest would be to look into this *transgressive* aspect of aesthetic representation in political theatre where space, nonetheless becomes essential for a certain kind of fulfilment, but the tools to analyse such a political theatre would be quite a challenge. I will be drawing the conception of *transgression* from Michel Foucault's work of *Language, Counter-Memory and Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. In *Preface to Transgression*, Foucault explains transgression in the context of liberated sexuality that has been pushed to its limit of the consciousness, at the limit of the law. "Sexuality is a fissure – not one which surrounds us as the basis of our isolation or individuality, but one which marks the limit within us and designates us a limit" (Foucault, 1977: 30). Then in a sense, transgression is imminent with limits which it tries to cross-over via the act of it; crossing one limit and to be exposed to a new experience of limitless within a micro-interval – in the *present*. "Transgression carries the limit right to the limit of its being; transgression forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes (perhaps, to be more exact, to recognize itself for the first time)" (Foucault 1977: 35). Assisting to this, the logic of transgressive aesthetics will neither seek not to justify its act in its conformity over an already crossed limit nor will it claim a victory over limits of two opposing positions. Instead transgressive aesthetics acts in the *present* to open up the *missed possibilities* of the already crossed limits and to engage in the potential for further transgressions.

- One can say that by merely hanging any body and creating a spectacle out of it, how it could possibly extract the political from such a figure. Extending this, then the paradigms of

political theatre and its predicament for a definition, which is coming from my field work research will open up a debate besieging a given professed cultural practice of 'art'. To pose a precise point – how these groups were performing a different aesthetic for its spectator and was there even a sense of political at all? Necessitating, the contingency of a term like political theatre and its historical lineage, it will be of immense importance for me to see it from a critical point of view posit and promulgate that canonical understanding¹⁴ of these aesthetic shifts has to be re-encountered with. So, the earlier analysis would not be taken as something that commences a complete repudiation of existing tools but only to make these existing tools a *trampoline* – to jump and experience a chance of that flight of joy.

Interlinked to the idea of political theatre is its own changing vocabulary – “those days most of the plays were done in Palace Theatre, Coral Club, in front of Chandralok and Prayag Sangeet Samiti”¹⁵. Interestingly, IPTA Allahabad was consistently producing some remarkable productions on proscenium space which were not banned by the State during the earlier stage of Emergency. But at the same time were directly profaning the police machinery to disrupt their performance – “we were doing *Afeem ke Phool* only at Prayag Sangeet Samiti and somebody from the audience came and told our friends – “the backstage that the police is waiting for us to finish the performance...we finished the play and our friends who we not involved in the play, asked us to wear saaris and veil our faces...we got out and ran from the back side of the building.....we didn't expect this because earlier the same production was done by other members at P.D. Tandon park and the police was there but did nothing on that day”¹⁶. Here, one can assess the nature of excitement involved, that on the part of the audience and also of the performer but to see it in terms of a political action

¹⁴ Canonical understanding of political theatre, takes intent of the act as its focus. See Michael Kirby, *On Political Theatre*.

¹⁵ Personal interview with Zia-ulHaq on 13 June, 2012

¹⁶ Personal interview with Kaushal Kishore on 04 July, 2012

which corresponds to the restriction or quasi restriction would be a motivating exploration. Using the word quasi restriction takes into account the position adopted by CPI vis-à-vis Emergency¹⁷-- then the role of State, in defining what is censored and what is not, comes into picture. A general understanding regarding Emergency is that of a blanket censorship. But such an exercise of censorship under Emergency can be further questioned if we look at the above mentioned interview. What is at stake here is to investigate this negotiating nature of the State with respect to theatre.

These plays tried to channelize a new sensibility of social consciousness, trying to realize the potential from the missed possibilities. I develop this framework of missed possibilities from Walter Benjamin's *Theses 'On the Concept of History'*. My primary concern is to take off from the conventional understanding of theatre historiography, while at the same time try to formulate a line of thought beyond the idea of redemption, politically. For Benjamin the philosophy of history's theory of progress is always homogenous that becomes complete in propriety of self-referential fulfillment. His major concern is to break this deceptive progression of history which is based on cause and effect. The moment this is broken the presumed thread line is put at standstill – "dialectics at a standstill". Thesis V states,

The true image of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which lashes up at the moment of its recognizability and is never seen again. 'The truth will not run away from us': this statement by Gotfried Keller indicates exactly that point in historicism's image of history where the image is pierced by historical materialism. For it is an irretrievable image of the past which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize itself as intended in that image.

(Benjamin, 2003: 390-391)

¹⁷According to CPI, Emergency has to be seen in the light of internal disturbances and the upsurge of right wing. P.C. Joshi Archive, JNU: New Age Vol. XXIII No.26, p – 1.

From the above quoted thesis, what Benjamin is trying to harp on is activation of historical materialism which activates the past not from its linear baggage of completeness, but the potential it carries in an engagement with *this moment* of the present. When Benjamin says “the true image of the past”, it must be noted that he is not asserting a satiated version of past truth, instead “articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it ‘the way it really was’...” (Benjamin, 2003; 391) ‘The way it really was’ has been put down in his seventh note to the text – Leopold von Ranke, considered by many to be the greatest German historian of nineteenth century was a major proponent of historicism.

That is why this dissertation will look at the terrain of negotiation and its operational aspect which would address those junctures of events in this political theatre movement. The rise and fall in terms of their activities of these three groups that I am looking at – IPTA, JANAM and DASTA, is generally seen as a narrative which frames a structure of a starting point and an ending point. Distinct, from marking such a decline, this dissertation will probe those vanishing points as carrying potential to intervene in the continuum progression which resulted in the formation of more and more fringe cultural groups.

“We did our first play from DASTA in the year 1978, Hum Na Sahenge Zor Kisika....JANAM came in 1979.....a local unit was also formed”¹⁸. So if there was a need to form a group, or a need to produce new plays, it would be very important to look into the aspect of simultaneity. The time difference between IPTA and JANAM/DASTA comes from a big gap, where Emergency also plays an intermediary role. But the time gap between JANAM and DASTA is almost nil. One may argue that these are two different organizations, two different art practices and two different political ideologies. So why won’t they function

¹⁸Personal interview with K.K. Pandey on 3 July 2012

simultaneously? I believe this is too much a simplistic approach. On the contrary, our concern should be to map out these simultaneous events on the one hand as indicating the realization of such a *missed* among the practitioners. And on the other hand this dissertation while presenting the groups point of view will not hold onto the argument of fulfillment of the *missed* by these fringe cultural groups also. Because this missed cannot be a unitary category. And yes everything cannot be *missed*. It emerges precisely from the practices of these groups that push the boundaries of linkages between arts and politics.

CHAPTER DESIGN

Chapter I: Habits in Waiting: Theatre of the State & Transgression

Considered to be one of the important figures in theatre circles, particularly during the late '60's till his death inside prison, Dr. Satyabrata Sinha's performance of *Waiting for Godot* and *Andher Nagri*, under the group of *Prayag Rangmanch* will propel a new kind of reading of these texts – juxtaposed with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) putative functioning of *habits* in *Waiting for Godot* while experimenting with the elements of Theatre of the Absurd in *Andher Nagri*. Also methodologically, this dissertation will orient itself with the writings of Dr. Sinha from the book *Hindi Rangkarm ke Amritputra: Dr. Satyabrata Sinha* to pin-point the thought process involved in these productions. Taking a cue from Dr. Sinha's own assertion about a certain level of resemblance between RSS and the text of *Waiting for Godot*, waiting as a part of habitual practice will bring in physicality, involved at the level of games, routine body exercises which also replicates the functioning of *shakhas* of RSS. Keeping the Emergency in mind, this chapter would assist me to lay-out, not only the historical background but also the juridico-political framework, which were becoming non-

conducive for the State to maintain its legitimacy. *Afeem ke Phool* performed under the banner of IPTA will deal with these questions through the characters of Daadu and Peelu.

Chapter II: Stretching the Order of Limits: Performing Bodies of Non-Belonging

This chapter will try to bring in the shift from IPTA to JANAM & DASTA. Since JANAM and DASTA's formation/functioning was not demarcated by a gap in the timeline, their performances were taking into account – the buffer zone (from 1977 till 1979, Morarji Desai government acted in a high handed way, constricting Union activities). Though JANAM's involvement was initiated from outside the periphery, it tried to set up a local unit.

In accordance with texts like *Machine* and *Aurat*, JANAM had already situated its own aesthetics. I will discuss the mundaneness of human body in the performance of *Machine* and it will also deal with the proposition of an uncanny figure of human robot – a human being in itself, representing a robot. In addition to this I will argue that representation of body cannot be the only tool to analyze a performance such as *Machine* because this body doesn't have a coherent referential point. According to Moloysree Hashmi, the concept of *Agit-prop* is nothing new but their approach for creating a new *value* out of these texts was more meaningful. Performances were given more preference over the quality of performance¹⁹. To see this *value*²⁰ as a stretching mark in the minds of the spectator, it would then deal with questions like – were the ingredients of these texts (moment of strike in *Aurat*) acted as a *congealment of value*? On the other side, if this value is text driven through their performance, then in the context of *strike* which calls for a suspension of work, how will it be tenable to

¹⁹ Personal Interview with Moloysree Hashmi on 17 August 2012

²⁰ In Marxian, economic school of thought, value is indexed with commodity. In the context of the interview with Moloysree Hashmi, *value* goes side by side with its *meaning*. Then if these new meanings were given birth through their performances, it would be essential to look into the repetition of the same performances. Would it then be a question of opening, more new meanings that would act against any textual directed *congealment*?

seek a *value of strike* in theatre? In the performance, does the raising of red flag constitute only a symbolical gesture? Or the *value of strike* stands in sharp contrast with the representation of strike in the play?

Chapter III: Political Theatre in *Now Time*: Missed Possibilities in Transgressions

I open this chapter with a detailed description of two photographs, in which members of DASTA are reciting songs from a book. Through this I propose what Judith Butler uses in one of her paper title – *Bodies in Alliance*; while introducing the poem *Sangam ki Dharti Par*, written by Neelabh Ashk and which was incorporated in the play, *Shahar Khamosh Nahi*. Connecting it to the larger dynamics of communal tension in the region of Uttar Pradesh, I go into the formation of Indian People's Front of the erstwhile C.P.I. [Marxist-Leninist]. I have quoted three interviews at length, one of K.K. Pandey, other that of Pankaj Srivastav and Prof. Sanjay Saxena, to critically engage with the performance of the play *Shahar Khamosh Nahi*, done under a situation of curfew imposed region of Allahabad. As I deal with the issue of aesthetics and politics, expositions from the interviews will entail my investigation into a self-reflexive question i.e. what can be called a political theatre? Through these questions, I will be able to explore more into the tension between art and politics. Moreover I will locate this political theatre in the domain of activation of the *missed possibilities*, wherein Walter Benjamin's *Theses 'On the Concept of History'* will become my guiding source. Starting from the logic of an analogy of weapon in the form of an automaton, the discourse on redemption of these missed possibilities will be dealt from an angle of *now time*. While summing it up I will raise the question of communal-fascist danger, in the wake of today's political situation in India. These questions will become the core of this chapter.

CHAPTER I

Habits in Waiting: Theatre of the State and Transgression

This chapter will set-up the debate, starting from ‘new theatre’ and ‘experimental theatre’, in the work of the significant actor-playwright-director in the landscape of Allahabad, Dr. Satyabrata Sinha’s. While his work start around the period of late 1960’s, which initiates the discourse of ‘new theatre’ and ‘experimental theatre’, the questions of ‘what’s new in new theatre’ will raise pertinent points of political theatre in relation to the pre-Emergency period. The chapter takes up two plays – *Waiting for Godot* and *Andher Nagri*. While the adaptation of *Waiting for Godot* might seem to be a strange point to start with the discussion about political theatre, it provides an excellent entry as the adaptation offers the link between habituated actions and communalism. Dr. Sinha’s critical take on the habitual practices in RSS’s *shakhas* will bring in the ideological construct of the *Sangh* around the idea of *apotheosis*. Elaborating on directorial anecdotes and performance description of *Andher Nagri*, on the other hand will highlight the contemporariness of theatre with relation to everyday political moorings, raising the central question of possibility of ‘new’ in art. Following this, I will analyse the performance of *Afeem ke Phool* to interrogate the moment of *transgressive* act in the characters of Daadu and Peelu – ‘illegal acts’ of two drug addicts will deal with larger issues of state repression inside a situation of Emergency.

Hindu Nationalism and its Corporeality: Waiting for Nothing

Exonerate this part for being humbly polemical. *Waiting for Godot* was of course not his first directorial diletante. Dr. Satyabrata Sinha by 1972 had already produced *Gora*, *Lehron ke Rajhans*, *Andher Nagri* and acted in sixteen other plays. But more than his persona, I am concerned about different trait of thoughts which proliferates a new dimension in such a body of thinking.

On one side, his very conception about contemporary Hindi theatre was taking into account the staunch criticism it was facing with respect to the divide between west model of theatre and its counterpart being seen as something which has its own ground of aesthetics. Understanding from these standpoints he became very clear about his thought that a serious engagement with 'new theatre' in India must not be seen from a negative perspective; that 'new theatre' here was not trying to only inculcate a superficial framework of theatre practices of the west.

“I find myself helpless to understand that 'new theatre' in general has tried to alienate people from their life. Or that it has produced a negative philosophy and whatever is there, it's a bad copy-version of the west. I even don't accept that understanding and expressing the process of 'new theatre' is in anyway anti-national work”.

(Anand, 2009: 60)

On the other side, his unrelenting belief about the non-circumscribing aspect of such a 'new theatre' puts him in a strange strand of school, particularly vis-a-vis propagandist theatre. He says that,

“In the name of revolution, should we only close ourselves?...Yes, although it happens that every kind of profundity gets away from me and with respect to anti-profundity, may be I get profound. Then, possibly a creation is produced on the stage which is entirely linked with life but appears in front of it.”

(Anand, 2009: 61)

Quite intense about a way of thinking, we see a deep anxiety and restlessness in the above mentioned statement. In his own way, the kind of tension between a thesis and an anti-thesis was always playing at the back of his mind – the logic of profundity in relation with something that speaks in stark contrast to that profundity, negating the logic of profundity through its own logic of anti-profundity; and the stand-off between two logics, giving rise to a new creation on the stage. To comprehend this restlessness, it is rather imperative to locate those various strands through which the periphery of 'new theatre' and 'experimental theatre' was trying formulate a non-canonical *felony*²¹.

It is here that we find, somewhat concomitant – Theatre of the Absurd. Acknowledging the fact that among theatre critics, there is this tendency of clubbing-up 'new theatre' and 'experimental theatre' as a part of Theatre of the Absurd is nothing new. The real stake which matters for even its aorta of definition per se will be to not only challenge but also *transgress* the status-quo nature of conventional-experimental theatre²².

²¹ See, *Hindi Rangarm ke Amritputra: Dr. Satyabrata Sinha*. I use this term with respect to the debate surrounding 'new theatre' vis-a-vis its very definition, within the work of Dr. Sinha. He propounds that setting up a monolithic style of schooling in theatre as done in the case of National School of Drama (NSD) where only one person runs the show for a good ten years, will only lead to 'bureaucratic lobbying'. Eventually the heads of these institutions, set-up the terms even for financial funds and amateur theatre groups run after this financial aid or stamp for their survival.

During Second World War there was desecration about the entire state of affairs... Particularly in the field of creativity words, colours, sounds became meaningless. Through this subsistence of conditions Theatre of the Absurd was born.

(Anand, 2009: 98)

Traversing through these questions besieging life, death and intermissions which are inseparable and more relevant to his own present day situation, Dr. Sinha chose to produce *Waiting for Godot*. Coming from a background of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), what struck him most was this uncanny similarity between the putative function of habit within RSS and that of the normative logic of waiting in *Waiting for Godot*.

In the play, the characters of Vladimir and Estragon are eternally waiting for someone. This someone, who is supposedly called as Godot, will come and take away all their pain and suffering. But no one comes. Instead Pozzo comes with his servant Lucky that too, with all his sadness, pessimism and cynicism. At the end of every section of the play, a boy appears who claims himself to be the son of God. He informs everybody that he won't come today, he will come tomorrow. But that tomorrow never comes. Still their lingering continues. They destroy their present in the hope of a far future, when Godot will come.

Waiting is the recurrent motif throughout the play. Although Godot breaks his promise, the two tramps did show diligence. Although they suffer from excruciating damage – disappointment, pain, frustration, they still keep on waiting because that is their only hope as they believe only Godot can save them. Possibly, one can think of – how to get salvation? At hand they have only one job to do – to wait for Godot. Their waiting is guided by a series of

²² Ibid; 98

word games, rhythmic patterns of prosaic question & answer, routine body games and to do *nothing*²³.

Vladimir: Our Savior. Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other... dammed.

Estragon: Saved from what?

Vladimir: Hell.

(McDonald, 2006: 43)

Staging this play in Hindi and enacting the role of Vladimir, Dr. Sinha's concern about communication can be seen with respect to that of audience and their reception. Translated into Hindi from French, Mr. Baldev Kumar Vaidya also would have thought the same impediment. But Dr. Sinha looked at the play located in universality where the appeal and outlook of the play – silence, pause, overcutting dialogues gave Estragon and Vladimir the full liberty to represent its ignominy. "Their mundane wait could fall out of place, if it didn't match with the tempo of their dialogues. Thus the synchronization between dynamism and allegro was kept within the reach of each other. Actor's mobility and projection of the verbal text on stage created an atmosphere through which the characters of Vladimir and Estragon established themselves as representatives of entire humanity". (Anand, 2009: 21)

Understanding such a stand point, it is necessary to mark out the representative structure within the characters of Vladimir and Estragon. Their routine dialogues and unnecessary brooding over a set of dull question and answer, not only gives an impulse of the present day abnormality but also portend towards a phenomenon, i.e. to just wait. If then waiting is the

²³ See the text of *Waiting for Godot*. Its opening lines starts with Vladimir and Estragon saying about doing nothing. But their doing 'nothing' engulfs the entire play's text. In other words, if it had to be nothing then a satirical remark about waiting commensurate their utmost banal activity of everyday life; a life in which their sole purpose is to fill-in huge interstices.

penultimate action or practice, then within an organizational structure like that of RSS, what is it that Dr. Satyabrata Sinha finds so much analogous?

At this juncture, I would like to bring in the work of Ian MacDonald, who did an extensive survey at various RSS *shakhas*²⁴ during 1998. In his article '*Physiological Patriots*'? *The Politics of Physical Culture and Hindu Nationalism in India*, he articulates the relationship between physical culture and Hindu nationalism in India.

Every morning, evening and night in urban spaces, clearings and open land throughout India, groups of young men congregate for their daily shakha, the fundamental building block of the RSS. There are approximately 40,000 shakhas throughout India, each attended by between 10 and 80 volunteers. Lasting for one hour, the shakha follows a set pattern every day, although the emphasis in the evening sessions is more on games than exercises.

(MacDonald, 1999: 351)

This corporeal paradigm, exercised as a part of habitual necessity is something which comes closest to an understanding of training and taking measures to discipline oneself. Possibly one can argue about its logical fallout – to train oneself. Even then, it's fascinating to keep in mind the very *model of cast* in which each of these participant members are *moduled*. Also never to forget to imbibe these set-patterns just like a litany – a habit in which the church goer is meant to follow that particular form of prayer. An exercise in practice will then not only be a manoeuvring strategy or a tool to mould but to insinuate an idea of distancing. This sense of distancing is not a clear binary being placed with respect to object and its

²⁴ Shakhas are the local branches of Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh (also known as RSS). Its literal meaning is also branch, that of a tree. RSS is one of the constituent organizations in the Sangh Parivar whose ideology preaches for Hindu Nationalism. It has various other outfits – at the political front, Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), at student level, Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), at farmer's level, Bhartiya Kisan Sangh, Rashtra Sevika Samiti which works at the women front, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) to name a few. In total it has 31 registered organizations.

counterpart – subject. To support this statement I will draw an example from Ian MacDonald's article.

Some games are explicitly ideological. For example, one that I observed at an evening shakha in Bombay preached the expansionist philosophy of the RSS. The boys hold each other by the arms and form a circle around a small stone that is inside a circle. A slogan about the city of Lahore in neighbouring Pakistan, Lahore Kiska Hai ('whose is Lahore?') is shouted repeatedly by the shakha leader, with increasing levels of aggression and urgency. And each time the leader's shout is answered by the players: Lahore Hamara Hai ('Lahore is ours!'). As this question-and-answer session proceeds, the bodily tensions increase. At some point, the leader blows a whistle, the signal for the players to let go of each other and be the first to grab the stone – the symbol of Lahore.

(MacDonald, 1999: 351-352)

On one hand, what can be seen here is the sheer amplitude of aggression being channelized via a symbol of stone. On the other hand, maintaining or sustaining a mechanized thought of overpowering something which is not real, is though being achieved by a mediatory string of acts. Interdictory to this would be the process of waiting by the four characters in *Waiting for Godot*. Wherein their word games, meaningless dialogues and conversation can only prolong and at the same time evade their sense of waiting. Simultaneously, it must not be confused that to avoid this sense of waiting; the string of acts/actions which are performed by the actors on stage is basically conceived to fulfil a larger cause – tireless waiting. It has to be seen within the logic of *habit*. The habit of swaying word games, playful activity which just simply keeps on lingering their process of waiting. Habits in waiting.

Estragon: Charming spot. (He turns, advances to front, halts facing auditorium.) Inspiring prospects (He turns to Vladimir.) Let's go.

Vladimir: We can't.

Estragon: Why not?

Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot.

Similarly, their sudden disjunction, moving from one playful story to another, keeps on running a pliable narrative.

Estragon: (step forward). You're angry? (Silence, Step forward). Forgive me. (Silence, Step forward. Estragon lays his hand on Vladimir's shoulder.) Come, Didi. (Silence) Give me your hand. (Vladimir half turns.) Embrace me! (Vladimir stiffens.) Don't be stubborn! (Vladimir softens. They embrace. Estragon recoils.) You stink of garlic!

Vladimir: It's for the kidneys. (Silence. Estragon looks attentively at the tree.)
What do we do now?

Estragon: Wait.

Vladimir: Yes, but while waiting.

Estragon: What about hanging ourselves?

Vladimir: Hmm. It'd give us an erection.

Estragon: (highly excited). An erection!

Vladimir: With all that follows. Where it falls mandrakes grow. That's why they shriek when you pull them up. Did you not know that?

Estragon: Let's hang ourselves immediately!

Vladimir: From a bough? (They go towards the tree.) I wouldn't trust it.

Estragon: We can always try.

Vladimir: Go ahead.

Estragon: After you.

This sudden break-away from a description about an Englishman being drunk and landing up at a brothel, to Estragon's remark about the stink of garlic, disrupts the continuity of the narrative. But while disrupting, there is an underlying motivation for careless conjugality; intertwining of their everyday casual talk which is also mechanical in terms of its tangibility. Extending the above quoted lines, what we can also see is an abject situation of Vladimir and Estragon. Their constant deferral of leaving the place keeps them in the hunt for their useless contemplation. Starting from, that they might have come to a wrong place, the characters of Vladimir and Estragon gives us an insight into the coercive aspect of habitual practices. This is further pointed out during their initial conversation regarding the boot.

Vladimir: Boots must be taken off everyday. I'm tired telling you that. Why don't you listen to me?

Beckett himself explicates and writes about habit in *Proust*,

Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability, the lightning conductor of his existence. Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit...

(*Proust* Beckett: 8)

Another efficacy of such a habitual practice within the play is the infusion of games. In Act I it starts with Vladimir and Estragon interchanging their pair of lines.

Estragon: (feebly). Help me!

Vladimir: It hurts?

Estragon: (angrily). Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!

Vladimir: (angrily). No one ever suffers but you. I don't count. I'd like to hear what you'd say if you had what I have.

Estragon: It hurts?

Vladimir: (angrily). Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!

Estragon: (pointing). You might button it all the same.

The play's text continues with its narrative which feeds into the chronology of itself but thematically exposes and enucleates its palpable absurdity. Moving from one set of conversation to another there are a lot of repetitive dialogues and also within the same continuity of verbal exchanges. Taking an example from the above text, it's also important to note that even the emotions/direction (written by the playwright in brackets) is not disparate. Repetition of the line "Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!" said by Estragon is again used by Vladimir but with the same emotion. These routine like mechanical dialogues come in copious amount throughout the text. A certain kind of conventionality is spun over with its own non-functionality, directed through habits in practice.

Apotheosis: Lucky at the service of Pozzo

This leads us to another area of concern, right before us. Not contending with the fact that we see a posthumous waiting act, in *Waiting for Godot*, this insidious hope becomes a crucial parable. A parable, closely conflated with the organizational ideology of *Sangh*. In the play, different names are called for the same person. Vladimir, who is one of the two main characters of the play, seems to be more responsible and mature. He is addressed as Didi by Estragon and as Mr. Albert by the boy. While Estragon, the second of the two main characters, is called as Gogo by Vladimir.

Vladimir: You're my only hope.

Estragon: (with effort). Gogo light – bough not break – Gogo – Gogo dead.
Didi heavy – bough break – Didi alone. Whereas

Vladimir: I hadn't thought of that.

Carrying the impulse of satire and critique on RSS, Dr. Sinha would go on to remark about its organic similarity to that with the figure of Pozzo and Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*.

Within the organizational set-up – officers, respected ones and most respected one's behaviour would resemble with that of Pozzo. Their speech would be like Lucky. In the Sangh 'Dear', 'Respected', and 'Most Respected' are not addressed just because out of some reverence but these are according to their respective posts.

(Anand, 2009: 12)

Formulating a more nuanced argument and taking a cue from the above text, what we can see is the hierarchical order within the Sangh. A hierarchical order in which the pinnacle is always kept floating with an *apotheosis*²⁵. In the case of RSS, an apotheosis is the chief who is not only at the helm of affairs but also carries the icon of an ideal. This image of epitomized persona as a being, is deeply connected with RSS's doctrine, especially that in the works of M.S. Golwalkar.

In *We or Our Nationhood*, Golwalkar portend towards this conception of an ideal, where a being's own individual schooling and mastery over oneself should be seen within the ambit for national construction. And thus it is on a cultural terrain, in terms of bodily manifestation. "Our concept of Hindu Nation is not a mere bundle of political and economic rights, it is essentially cultural" (Golwalker, 1996: 34). For someone like M.S. Golwalkar "An ideal

²⁵ See 'Physiological Patriots'? : *The Politics of Physical Culture and Hindu Nationalism in India*. Ian Macdonald uses this term in relation with his example of chanting of Lahore that needs to be attacked. According to him, the very purpose of such a narrative of heroism is to channelize an effective combat unit. This combat unit is more like a street-fighting squad rather than a modern warfare tactics. And thus follows up in political practice, giving birth to a Hindu *homo fascitus*.

requires a method, a process for its realisation in actuality". For he believes that to carry such a procedural method, "this work of moulding minds and building character cannot be done by sermons or administering pledges. The spirit of devotion to the nation has to be a steady flame, burning day in day out and year after year. And so people should gather daily and regularly in an environment congenial to its growth...We call it shakha" (MacDonald, 1999: 351)

Keeping this context in mind, it will be quite interesting to look into the character of Pozzo and Lucky. As it has already been noticed in the statement of Dr. Sinha, I would like to spot the following dialogue, made by Pozzo.

POZZO: (with magnanimous gesture). Let's say no more about it. (He jerks the rope.) Up pig! (Pause) Every time he drops he falls asleep. (Jerks the rope) Up hog! (Noise of Lucky getting up and picking up his baggage, Pozzo jerks the rope) Back! (Enter Lucky backwards) Stop! (Lucky stops) Turn! (Lucky turns. To Vladimir and Estragon, affably.) Gentlemen, I am happy to have met you. (Before their incredulous expression.) Yes yes, sincerely happy. (He jerks the rope.) Closer! (Lucky advances.) Stop! (Lucky stops.) Yes, the road seems long when one journeys all alone for . . . (he consults his watch) . . . yes . . . (he calculates) . . . yes, six hours, that's right, six hours on end, and never a soul in sight. (To Lucky.) Coat! (Lucky puts down the bag, advances, gives the coat, goes back to his place, takes up the bag.) Hold that! (Pozzo holds out the whip. Lucky advances and, both his hands being occupied, takes the whip in his mouth, then goes back to his place. Pozzo begins to put on his coat, stops.) Coat! (Lucky puts down the bag, basket and stool, helps Pozzo on with his coat, goes back to his place and takes up bag, basket and stool.) Touch of autumn in the air this evening. (Pozzo finishes buttoning up his coat, stoops, inspects himself, and straightens up.) Whip! (Lucky advances, stoops, Pozzo snatches the whip from his mouth, Lucky goes back to his place.) Yes, gentlemen, I cannot go for long without the society of my likes (he puts on his glasses and looks at the two likes) even when the likeness is an imperfect one. (He takes off his glasses.) Stool! (Lucky puts down bag and basket, advances,

opens stool, puts it down, goes back to his place, takes up bag and basket.) Closer! (Lucky puts down bag and basket, advances, moves stool, goes back to his place, takes up bag and basket. Pozzo sits down, places the butt of his whip against Lucky's chest and pushes.) Back! (Lucky takes a step back.) Further! (Lucky takes another step back.) Stop! (Lucky stops. To Vladimir and Estragon.) That is why, with your permission, I propose to dally with you a moment, before I venture any further. Basket! (Lucky advances, gives the basket, goes back to his place.) The fresh air stimulates the jaded appetite. (He opens the basket, takes out a piece of chicken and a bottle of wine.) Basket! (Lucky advances, picks up the basket and goes back to his place.) Further! (Lucky takes a step back.) He stinks. Happy days!

In this entire speech made by Pozzo what one can see is the formulation of a system of tutelage. Wherein this tutelage has also a systematic acceptance or consents that is being fulfilled by Lucky. Saying this it is very important to look into the aspect of directional guidance constructed by Pozzo in order to sustain his hierarchical superiority. As a malevolent master, Pozzo performs his 'duty', instructing Lucky for his assorted needs. Though these orders are very miniscule at one level, it also reflects a covenant functioning within the logic of indemnity. This indemnity is a protection which is being procured by Lucky, acting within the line of every declaration, dispensed by Pozzo.

Elaborating this above point further, I would come back to the idea of "ideal" and its actual realization, circumscribing an ideology such as that of RSS. Herein as a master, Pozzo prescribe orders at Lucky, which he is meant to follow. Lucky being the servant fulfils all his masterly proclamation, without even a hint of denial. What becomes dutiful for Lucky is to obey his master's instruction wilfully. Now, here it must not be a simplistic understanding related to oppression. We do take into cognisance, Pozzo's behaviour as overtly inhuman. But more than that what we are concerned about is the "ideal being" which is extracted

through Lucky. This creates an ideal state of affairs for Pozzo because he is the one who is setting the terms for Lucky to tag on and perform his duties. An “ideal being” of “ideal” habits; habits, which has to be culturally trained so as to profess a structure of Hindutva.

Andher Nagri: Novelty of Representation

Moving onto another production, directed and acted by Dr. Satyabrata Sinha, I will try to focus on the performance of *Andher Nagri*. The text in itself dates back to 1881, but has become a popular tale over the years and has caught the attention of many directors to stage it, with new interpretations. To a large extent, this section will also include his writings on a particular performance of this production. Written by Bhartendu Harishchandra, *Andher Nagri* was taken up by Dr. Sinha for the first time in 1965. Before this he had himself seen a production of *Andher Nagri* somewhere around 1960. But to his utter dismay, the production was not able to place itself within a contemporary context. He recollects,

As far as I remember, it was during 1960 that I saw a production of *Andher Nagri*. It was an attempt to present as-it-is. In the market scene, every grocery item – pulse, flour, sweets etc was there on stage in reality. Other characters like the King, minister, petitioner, carpenter would remind of Parsi Theatre. As a result, it didn't move the audience of 1960. In totality, there was acknowledgement for the author and at the end everything appeared shabby.

(Anand, 2009: 87)

In his production of *Andher Nagri*, there was an attempt to improvise and contextualize the text in a new way. Costumes were given a new look according to modern times, masks were

used for other supporting actors in the King scene. The Minister wore pant and coat whereas the female grocer came in slacks. Overall it was considered a successful production but still there was nothing refreshing about the performance. Other characters were still imbued in the conventional style of comical-satirical acting where they only imitated those characters. According to Dr. Sinha, imitation of a character is quite-essential in aesthetics but,

Even though the imitation was fine it was not aesthetically sound. When I say that it was not aesthetically sound, then the meaning should be clear. Albeit imitation in itself is an art but when it binds an actor in a limited sphere to act-out a persona, then it loses its own purpose. That's why it's the responsibility of an actor to play-out different characteristics of a role and through it, keep the iconic figure of a character at bay.

(Anand, 2009: 88)

What we can assess is a kind of conformism that he was trying to deal with. A conformism that nonetheless counted on conventionality, canonical tools of acting, and being *true to the text*, its utmost proliferation came in the profile of stagnation. For which, only inquisitiveness can propel a certain kind of disavowal. Through this disavowal may be a new possibility could generate new invectiveness. In this case, an abjuration of indispensable imitation; which will not reject imitation as such in totality, but will try to *transgress* and open up a novelty of representation.

Because if this novelty is not thought about, then we will fall back into the same trope of, 'what's new in newness?' As an interrogation, it also becomes a question of conceptualization of a play which was written in the late Nineteenth century. Since the point was to do a production of *Andher Nagri* in a new form, generating new meanings and

interpretations according to their times, they (the members of Prayag Rangmanch²⁶) had to keep in mind the performance of the actors. Even more it was necessary to experiment with their theatricality in terms of language, gesture, dialogue delivery and soundscape.

In the following lines we will go through the conceptualization part and those different tools which were thought and executed for the production of *Andher Nagri*.

I thought about the language of this text which was written in the year 1881, or one can say the language of late Nineteenth century by juxtaposing it with the changing habits of our new generation. The fallout of this thought was, if we try to superimpose the language on gestures, we can lay open an absurdity of our present day condition and life's hollowness. This idea caught me and I started to ponder over it...Me and my colleagues discussed about it, and we started by recording the phrase of the play, 'andher nagri chaupat raja, takey ser bhaaji takey ser khaaja' in a musical tune....it took us almost three months for rehearsing the market scene – the female grocer, the money lender, Govardhandas, Narayandas and other grocer's had to learn and master themselves in 'twist' and 'shake' style of dance. Apart from this we tried to improvise on the gait of different characters – stock-still movements being one of them. We applied this particular movement at various junctures. One, when the Brahmin enters with his two disciples in the market place then the market scene freezes. Second, during the King scene, when the King and his Minister are about to leave after hearing out and delivering justice to the petitioner, they go into a static position; the petitioner by the time goes till the throne, touches it and after watching the other two characters immobile returns to his own position and gets still.

(Anand, 2009: 89-90)

In some sense, this above mentioned description, conjures up the debate of gestural language and its antithetical form, which is the textual language of the script here. In plaintiff terms a

²⁶ Prayag Rangmanch was formed on 30 July, 1961. Rabindranath Tagore's novel, *Gora* was the first production performed by Prayag Rangmanch. It was staged four times in that year – on 7, 8 October and then on 14, 25 November 1961. The play was adapted by Jeevan Lal Gupt and directed by Dr. Sinha.

connection which works within/through a relationship of disparities. Where such a disparity will not have to fulfil its own logic, of being at disparity but only to reach out and explicate a placement of standoffs among the two categories – textual language and gesture. Herein, the application of ‘shake’ and ‘twist’ dance on the character of Grocers, gives us another layer of disparity – a popular dance form superimposed on bodies, which have nothing to do with one another. We can of course argue that popular dance form like ‘shake’ and ‘twist’ became quite a part of the mainstream Hindi cinema and here its usage, amplifies its vulgar appropriation. Though understanding such a phenomenon where popular representation gets permeated within other cultural practices, what we cannot escape is the fact that it still carries a re-representational possibility.

This placing of two opposites then doesn’t nullify each other. Instead their mere exposition of standing in contrast to one another, can give an impetus toward another set of contradictions. As a case in point, from today’s point of view and analytical observation we can at least discuss, be critical about a performance such as *Andher Nagri*. As in, this conception of non-synchronous modus or if we can say, dis-harmony between language and gesture has been widely appropriated within the street art form especially in India. Also over the years, within performance studies academia there has been a critical investment on decoding and putting it in a historical context. Tracking it through the works of Brecht and his alienation theory²⁷, we presently stand at a juncture where a model already exists before us. But the real question which goes unanswered is that those performances that have followed the same tool; will they be called only a travesty of certain kind or is there something which we can look into, in terms of *transgression* within every performance? If such is the case, then we must be aware of the logic which disparages about a futility of such a *transgression* as it can only sneer at and offer us a regressive logic of it being useless.

²⁷ Brecht’s Alienation Theory uses the technique to distanciate its audience members from getting psychologically involved and emotionally taken into the narrative of the play.

During the change of scenes, we played the recorded music of Andher Nagri. And in between the actors were made to change the sets, in front of the audience. This was done throughout – from Market Scene to King scene then from King Scene to Hanging Scene. In the King Scene, the actors who were standing at still were also taken away as a part of property. Similarly in the Market Scene, when Govardhandas is all agog finding out that every item in the market is for same price then other characters like Vegetable Grocer, Money Lender, Fruit Grocer and Fish Grocer starts advertising their respective items in a whispering manner... This whispering continues till it reaches its crescendo when Govardhandas cries out loudly his teacher's name. After which again, everybody goes stand-still.

(Anand, 2009: 90)

Such an application of freeze movement and soundscape, where they trail after one another building up an intensity of a rhythmic pattern which at times allows itself to go over the textual narrative of the play. However, its basic innuendo is not to deride those portions where dialogues are said, rather to manipulate a *spatial cramp* within the spaces between actors who are on stage and also among their audience. When I use the word spatial cramp, it must be clear that basically we are dealing with a constricting nature of spatial arrangement, in which spaces are being created between the bodies of actors which are then translated into a meaning of its own towards the audience. With every gap of space filled, another space is created or one can say that with every space among the actors unfilled, anew space gets its meaning. Thus the play between spaces covered and uncovered are sedulously/concomitantly at struggle with one another, creating a *spatial cramp*.

The role of insane King was done by me. My only movement was walking from the throne to other characters – giving them justice and again return back to the throne...to cover a distance of hardly ten feet, my gait had to convince the character of a King who is restless to get on the throne for decades...

(Anand, 2009: 91)

Pushing the argument of *spatial cramp* in this context, it must be noted that when a character like that of an insane King in *Andher Nagri* has to maintain the logic of a King, then the role cannot possibly and only take into account a mere semblance. Even though the role is of a King, it must not portray a character of King like person. On stage, the King has got only ten feet to move, inside which the character can alter its spatial arrangement in order to magnify the apparition of King's walk. Hence the gait manipulates, the distance between actors and that of the throne, which in return accentuates a *spatial cramp* within this space.

Moving through another dramatic section of the play we see that as a part of justice, Govardhandas has been chosen to serve the punishment because the King has ordered to catch a person whose neck will fit in the hanging rope. Crying for help Govardhandas calls for his Guru. The Guru instigates a tactical move as he places an inception, that whoever will get hanged at this precise moment that person will go directly to heaven. After much hue and cry about everyone claiming to be the one, the King decides that since he is the King, only he has the divine right to get hanged and go straight to heaven. In the production, the final Hanging Scene gets conceived in a soundscape where all the other characters don't speak a word, only continuing with their reverberating presence – circling around the King with arms clasped to one another. Dr. Sinha comments, “methods of still, group formulation, soundscape are not new. Then what is new in arts, is a serious question.” (Anand, 2009: 91). On 15 July, 1975 he was arrested for his production of *Andher Nagri* and was charged under MISA²⁸. He died on 7 November, 1976. Emergency couldn't have done better than *Andher Nagri*.

²⁸ MISA – Maintenance of Internal Security Act. It was passed by the Parliament in 1971; giving power to the Indian law enforcement agencies to detain, seize property without a warrant etc. The legislation became infamous for its disregard of legal and constitutional safeguards of civil rights, especially when “going all the way down” on the competition, and during the period of national emergency (1975-1977) thousands of innocent people were believed to have been arbitrarily arrested, tortured and in some cases, forcibly sterilized.

“Illegal” Transgressions

Entering into another epoch of theatre practice in Allahabad, this section will deal with IPTA’s production of *Afeem ke Phool*. Selection of this particular production comes from a conscious choice – its historical impunity in the wake of National Emergency. To elaborate this it will be imperative to not only focus that this production was allowed to perform without any altercation with the police but also taking into consideration the play’s anti-state essence. Produced several times before 1974, it was not until the declaration of Emergency that this particular play would catch the attention and public fervour in its full proximity.

The play starts with two characters, Dadu and Peelu who have taken a heavy dose of *Afeem* (opium) are constantly ranting about their inability to distinguish between reality and non-reality. Since they are hallucinating, the affect of opium leaves them in pathetic situation of verbal overlapping of similar statements.

Peelu: Now I’ll go home... You don’t have afeem. Just check it for once.

Dadu: How come your sleepers have changed into shoes?

Peelu: Like that of a M.L.A. who moves from one party to another.

Dadu: Hmmm...

Peelu: But your shoes also...

Dadu: Oye...My shoes also seems to be different. But Peelu... How did this happen?

Peelu: You are a faggot... It’s simple, I wore your shoes and you took my sleepers.

(Translation mine, Radheshyam: 1)

These initial dialogues between Peelu and Dadu set up the tonality and structure of the play; where two drug addicts appear as down-trodden figures, contemplating about their personal belongings and introduces a satirical pun on the political opportunistic tendencies of elected representatives.

Dadu: I'm very sorry Peelu...I guess, I have had too much of afeem.

Peelu: You always say the same thing. I had too much of afeem...

Dadu: Peelu...Not you...I.

Peelu: That's what....You always say that I had too much.

Dadu: Tch Tch Tch...I, I... Look at me.

Peelu: Yes, I do understand. You always say that I had too much of afeem.
Now don't fool around.

(Translation mine, Radheshyam: 2)

Stemming from such a misunderstanding, we get a look into two characters whose conundrums are aggravated under the influence of opium. But at the same time their narrative through dialogues are being intercut by profane political positions. As we see from one of the statement made by Peelu regarding M.L.A's opportunist move from one party to another, it magnifies a metaphorical displacement in terms of profit gaining attitude of elected representatives.

Considering their pathetic situation, a profane declaration as this one can be the last thing to expect from them. Whereas, for them even such a declaration, is just another passing reference as a part of hard known truth in which they are used to live. Then it is rather prudent here, to look at the conjunction of a performance like *Afeem ke Phool* during Emergency, where direct political puns are subjected at the ruling class and also at the state

machinery (Police, Prison Warden) through two *dilapidated* entities – for whom it is always, already an Emergency in declaration.

As the play starts from the premise of drug addicts, Peelu and Daadu have inertly stated their declaration of not being in their senses. Since these two entities have already committed an “illegal activity” by consuming *Afeem*, in the play they become someone who doesn’t matter and their conversations are just under the pretext of being high on *Afeem*. Then even if a meticulous reason and thought provoking statement is uttered it will be regarded senseless.

Dadu: You can never be a good person

Peelu: Good person...

Dadu: Yes...A good person

Peelu: What is a good person? How can be a person good if it’s a person?

Dadu: A good person like me...

Peelu: You...A good person...?

Dadu: You and me both...

Peelu: That means, we both are good persons. Wow. It’s amazing that even being a person, we are good persons...Then how come the police always beat us?

Dadu: Their wish or you can say whims.

(Translation mine, Radheshyam: 8)

Through the figure of Peelu and Dadu an exposition can be accentuated towards the *rule by decree* even when a declaration is not promulgated by the state. Their contemplation over a good person, results in a logical malady – insignificant and entirely indifferent to whatever is happening around them – why are they subjected to maltreatment, fulfilling a fancy of vagaries?

Peelu: Had we been doctors..!!

Dadu: And then we wouldn't have to go to jail

Peelu: How?

Dadu: My father went to jail.

Peelu: My father went till the door.

Dadu: It's a bad omen to go till the door of a jail.

Peelu: Ya...

Dadu: And inside...?

Peelu: We are scared by the jail warden.

Dadu: And outside...?

Peelu: We live in a world of jail...

(Radheshyam: 9)

Imminently one thing must be clear, that the reference of jail and them being petrified in such a hostile atmosphere under the surveillance of jail warden entails, a gamut of disciplinary exercises run at the behest of the government. And which predisposes a fear even in the thought of these *irrelevant* beings. With regard to this, when asked about the characterization of these two figures of drug addicts, Mukhtar Ahmad recalls, "it's a straight forward political satire on the system"²⁹ but refuses to surmise on the very logic of a political satire through two *senseless* beings. My point of interjection will be to argue that even if the direct sardonic statements are toned down, the figure of Peelu and Dadu will still not remain immune from a situation like Emergency – they are those, whose condition cannot be more deplorable than their present state, and they will still be ill-treated at the whims of the State. Thus, if they are the most susceptible beings to repression, subjugation and tyranny then a condition like theirs

²⁹ Personal Interview with Mukhtar Ahmad on 12/11/12 at Lucknow Office of Communist Party of India

can open-up a legitimized facet of such despotism. The only difference being, consuming *Afeem* is just nothing compared to other “illegal activities” under Emergency. In effect, this will lead us to a more nuanced exploration of Emergency at exercise.

Thinking about Emergency it is rather more important to also look into the operational aspect of a situation such as Emergency. My point of precession is toward the restraints on numerous functions of things – (abolition of free press, impediment in terms of distribution of political literature, and a putative logic of efficiency contrary to the ‘lackadaisical functioning’, etc.) – within this, somewhat challenging parables addressing at the state (underground literature – handbills, cyclostyled printed materials) were nonetheless circulated.

These circulated materials were printed and distributed by members of certain organization or concerned individuals. Many of these literatures were confiscated as it would be detrimental for the State to pass it through – read by the *common intelligentsia* and further being passed on. Though, maintaining its vigour for the correct, truth and moral righteousness to prevail over the censored affairs of everyday life which was concurrent with upheaval and moorings of the people under Emergency, these manuscripts were always and till date are taken as *holistic vestiges* which by their very forte – their speciality of being ‘still existing’, in the absolute domain of seizure, repression and annihilation.

Writing in his introductory lines of the preface, Sajal Basu instigates, “For the first time in recent history perhaps, floating rumour could be so authentic and illuminating to the masses. In fact, the Emergency solemnised the role of rumour in public life.” (Basu, 1978: Preface). These lines not only explicate the rigour of these underground movements but also accentuate a phenomenon – clearly putting forward a sense of ‘truth value’ which were innate in their very conception.

Hitherto the *truth value* of any underground literature was only seen in the logical culmination of an *exercising excess* (Indian Emergency in this context; excess in terms of Emergency like situation given onto its people) by the State at the first place. As the promulgating power of exercising such a situation like Emergency rests under the government – actions that happen under coercion (ideally those which are restricted under a situation like Emergency) do tend to channelize its inception from a power, a power which is not given by the State, instead whose franchisees are the people themselves. And in this case, a censorship law implemented under the Emergency rule portend a *disfranchisement* of the people, which otherwise is rested onto the State/Government. Not to overlook, that this is just simply and blatantly told to the people that now they cannot exercise – only the impediment is blunt in a situation like, Emergency.

Amiya Rao & B.G.Rao, gives a keen insight into this discourse concerning around the *truth quotient*, – “It was only after the Turkman Gate tragedy that both of us decided that a serious effort should be made to produce a news bulletin giving at least some genuine, uncensored news items.... With the material thus available we produced on May 1, 1976 a news sheet in 18 copies. We called it ‘Satyasamachar’ (True news). On May 15 we produced the second number.... Our emphasis was on the ‘satya’ (truth) of the ‘samachar’ (news): The emphasis will always be on truth. Our self-imposed code will forbid incitement to violence, to communal passions and to anti-social behaviour; we will scrupulously avoid character assassination and tendentious writing; our constant endeavour will be to remind people that a personal dictatorship is working to perpetuate itself and that they have to fight it.”³⁰

Much to do, about this above quoted text is to sense that knowledge of *being betrayed*, *individual rights being curtailed* and the binary of domination, that of between *oppressor and*

³⁰ *The Pen in Revolt – Souvenir: Underground Literature Published during Emergency*, organized as Exhibition in Calcutta and New Delhi. Altogether around two thousand items were on display in AIFACS hall, New Delhi, between 16-19 April, 1978

oppressed (in this case, State and its Subject); and in order to overcome, whatever a “personal dictator”³¹ is imposing, should be fought tooth and nail – but clearly depositing and prescribing, what all should not be done. The most invigorating part of this is that of “self-imposed codes”³², which demarcates a sharp line between lines of functioning – should and should not. Then the question is neither that of Emergency being right or wrong nor is it a case of good fighting an evil rather, what needs assistance within this discourse is to empathize with the *rolling of a situation* like Emergency, where both the State and its Subjects are equal partners – each taking their own turn to partake in such a situation.

One thing needs to be clarified that when I am saying about both the players partaking in a situation, one should not assume it as a pacifist conformation of the situation; within this concurrent participation it also withholds an immunity, which is non-conducive to any thrust (repression, domination, muffling of dissent voices), within the same situation like Emergency, a case in point here.

Thrashing out this debate between *should and should not*, I would like to emphasize – does the State goad violence, communal passions gives a free hand to the police, operates high-handedly, fussily does character assassination or censors news reports only in a situation like Emergency? Amiya and B.G. Rao contemplate, “What happened in one neighbourhood could not be known to people living just five miles away. Thus, the happenings in Turkman Gate, we found, were not known to our friends in Defence Colony even three months later. In such circumstances two human traits asserted themselves to fill the vacuum created by the

³¹ *ibid*

³² *ibid*

pusillanimous behaviour of our Press – a desire to spread news and a desire to hit back at the oppressor with whatever weapon one could.”³³

Herein, it is imperative for us to understand and grapple more with this thought of “a desire to spread news and hit back at the oppressor”; is not simplistically evolving through a process or derives its logical fallout from a cause like Emergency being imposed/implemented which leads to censorship and thus provokes this desire of refusal of any sort of directive. On the contrary, I would argue that a situation like Emergency, unfurls a declaration of power which shouts-out loudly, to tell its people about the conspicuous affair of anarchy, which the State can no longer mitigate; though, leasing itself at the supreme command but concomitantly throwing up a new situation – a vacuum.

“The underground literature grew, nurtured by thousands and read by hundreds of thousands. Every one of the participants – even the readers faced some risk; but risk brought excitement and excitement in turn led to a certain level of commitment.”

Keeping this as a potential for benign belligerence, a simultaneous tier of exposition can be further seen in the text of *Afeem ke Phool* when Peelu and Dadu disavow their allegiance of listening to the third character (a defeated M.L.A). As this defeated M.L.A continues with his spree of illogical dialogues that why should he be again elected as a M.L.A, Peelu and Dadu in a moment of resentment and rage, repudiate by pushing the defeated M.L.A off the platform.

Peelu: Dadu, I am feeling sleepy

Dadu: Me also

³³ *The Pen in Revolt – Souvenir: Underground Literature Published during Emergency*, organized as Exhibition in Calcutta and New Delhi. Altogether around two thousand items were on display in AIFACS hall, New Delhi, between 16-19 April, 1978

Peelu: Can't we stop him from doing this

Dadu: Why not, let's try.

(Both of them push the man off the stage with full force. The man falls on the ground with his face down)

Peelu: Now what shall we do?

Dadu: Come on, let's get rid of this stage

Contrary to their act of *senseless* jabbering and fearful contemplation about the police and jail warden, here they pounce on an opportunity to mete out their deep seated anger. Up until, if it was their very trepidation of being subjugated at the mercy of State machinery then existence was living always/already in a mode of humiliation and utter disgrace. On the one hand it is comprehensible that in terms of action, they finally commit something which until now, within the text was far more suppressed. Their act of an outburst in such a form of tangible violence can draw a vector towards *transgression* – in this case, a militant political directive which can propel an audience to act and even calling for a realization of such an event.

Since it is realizable in a space that of theatre, even though happening within the realm of representation one may argue that it could be possible only in such a space where the space in itself is performed. Contrary to this, I would put forth that nonetheless a space is affirmed as a model conducive for such an act of *transgression*. And yes, this *transgression* is taking place through/within the logic of representation, what it also does is that of opening up new possibilities with new representational limitations to confront with. Thus an aesthetics representing transformative *transgression*, invites new *transgression* to be performed because the fall out after these events will never cease to circumscribe those conditions which themselves have been propelled by positing situations affront to one another. So when an

action is committed by Daadu and Peelu, it portends toward a supplementary set of risks while at the same time entrusting a crucial environment which they have fulfilled in the space of performance through/within the logic of representation. For them their confrontation has a corollary solution – asking for a resolution amicably that is in the domain of law.

Now by committing such an act of fearless frivolity, they themselves call upon the governance of law, calling for justice. Their recourse within the ambit of law obviously seems more as a tool for serving the purpose of an *Agit-Prop* theatre, which can place a critique of these institutions but can also magnify an intent directed towards some sort of resolution – a resolution in which justice can be served.

CHAPTER II

Stretching the Order of Limits: Performing Bodies of Non-Belonging

Adjacent to transgressive act of Daadu and Peelu discussed in the previous chapter, a specific incident took place during one of the performance of the same play *Afeem ke Phool* just after the declaration of Emergency. Kaushal Kishore recalls when asked about the nature of response from the side of State machinery,

“we were doing *Afeem ke Phool* only, at Prayag Sangeet Samiti and somebody from the audience came and told our friends at the backstage that the police is waiting for us to finish the performance...we finished the play and our friends who were not involved in the play, asked us to wear saaris and veil our faces...we got out and ran from the back side of the building.....we didn't expect this because earlier the same production was done by other

members at P.D. Tandon park and the police was there but did nothing on that day.”³⁴

A general understanding regarding Emergency is that of a blanket censorship. But such an understanding of the exercise of censorship under Emergency can be further questioned if we look at the above mentioned interview. To understand the complexity of censorship what is at stake here is to investigate this negotiating nature of the State with respect to theatre and also follow the line of thread with respect to the confrontational acts of such performances. To say the least, that a production like *Afeem ke Phool* could garner a temporal space – in relation to the act of pushing aside the M.L.A from stage and affirming a space of confrontation, as in the above quoted interview where such an act could be thought about. This is also placed in stark contrast with the happening of performance in itself, in two different geographies – one being performed at P.D. Tandon Park and the second at Prayag Sangeet Samiti. It remains a pertinent question that why one particular production would be given a lukewarm response in one show while, the other was dealt with highhanded repression by the state machinery?

Following this lead of enquiry, I will try to focus on the relationship of *spaces* within a situation such as that of the Emergency. An Emergency situation which not only entails logic of an extra-legal appendage to the existing norm of governance by a form of constitutional guarantee but also unfolds a space through itself which ultimately defines the very situation of Emergency. A space which goes well beyond the periphery not only limited to law, but over pouring or breaking the binary of the very domains of public and private spaces at the same time.

In addition to that, it must be clarified that an enactment of such a space like Emergency, cannot be defensible only on the basis that the declaration or proclamation of Emergency lead to a certain type of behavioural pattern among the citizens of a country. It can be formulated

³⁴ Personal Interview with Kaushal Kishore on 4 July, 2012.

in the sense that a condition is given onto the people after which they are expected to follow those particular set of codes, failing to which the State can impose charges; but it itself has levied the framework of legality under which impositions are justified.

Spatial Practices in the time of Emergency: An Analysis of Vande Mataram

Herein, Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*³⁵ will become somewhat a constant reference point to explicate the situation of Emergency. As a starting ground, the question of space in Emergency can be understood in terms of Lefebvre's idea of space. But my point of departure from Lefebvre's classification will also problematize those performances which were happening during the period of Emergency. In his work Lefebvre identifies representations of space, representational space, and spatial practices as three basic elements which constitute his *spatial triad*³⁶. *Representations of Space* generally refers to a conceptualized space, which is constructed by codifications, classifications and objectified representations, used and produced by people who set the rules.

Thus an entanglement of knowledge and power is always in the play to set these codes and to a large extent guided by an ideology which shapes the relation of production to produce "frontal relation" (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*: 33). Never denying that he was keeping in mind, the context of urbanization -- for which *Representations of space* included

³⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Trans.) Donald Nicholson-Smith, originally written in 1974, English publication first published in 1991, U.K. & U.S.A: Basil Blackwell Ltd. & Basil Blackwell Inc.

³⁶ See Andy Merrifield, "Henri Lefebvre: A Socialist in Space", in *Thinking Space* (ed.) Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, Critical Geographies, First published in 2000 by Routledge 11 New Fetter Lane, London. Simultaneously, published in the USA and Canada by Routledge. This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2003. Spatial triad is a term used by many other authors too, which tries to denote the three categories proposed by Lefebvre. Here Andy Merrifield's use of the term symbolizes it with a triangle in which it places Henri Lefebvre's three different categories to define and simplify the phenomenon of space in its happening.

architects, urbanists, engineers etc. he believed this space to be a space of capital in which bureaucratic and authoritarianism were immanent to give birth to a repressive space³⁷. To construe this in greater detail and for our convenience, let me recognize this as a space which has great affinities with the idea of Emergency enshrined in our Constitution. Invoking Emergency here is also basically taking into account the impunity it enjoys against Fundamental Rights. Since the basic tenet of the Constitution beholds any impinging sort of edict, Article 352, 356 and 360 is placed in direct contradiction with the already law-abiding citizen³⁸.

Moving onto the next category – *Representational Space* is also termed as lived space, a space of everyday mooring and its basis or core element is experiential. Here the experience comes from the use of its dwellers that are in a position to apply and exercise the symbolical image of its object. It differs from *Representations of Space* primarily on one ground that it is something which is undeniably more affective – purport a sense of the surrounding, environment and situation in which the dwellers are living in.

Thus *Representational Space* is always in flux of fluidity and retains a dynamic structure to it.

But at the same time it's also a space where *Representations of Space* has its way of forcing

³⁷ Ibid: 188. See *The Production of Space* where he writes, "bureaucratic and political authoritarianism immanent to a repressive space".

³⁸ See, Shah Commission of Inquiry: Report Volumes 1-3. The report clearly marks out that the earlier declaration of Emergency was always implemented on "external grounds", arising primarily from a situation of war, as was the case in 1962, 1964 and 1971. The Emergency declared on 25 June, 1975 was inimitable because the reason promulgated by the Government of India was based on assumptions of apparent threat to the security of the nation by "internal disturbances". It also said, "the right of equality under Article 14, the right of fundamental guarantee against deprivation of life and personal liberty according to procedure established by law also stood suspended and the protection against arrest and detention could not be challenged before the courts. The right of free speech and expression, right to assemble peacefully, to form associations and unions; to move freely throughout the territory of India; to reside and settle in any part of the territory; to acquire, hold and dispose of property and to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business, which were guaranteed under clause (1) of Article 19, could not thereafter be exercised." (p-6) Thus when the President of India invoked the Article 359 on 27 June, 1975 it directly meant that he was suspending the right of citizen to move any court for the implementation of fundamental rights, enshrined in the Constitution under the Article 14, 21, 22.

into the actuality of *Representational Space* because *Representational Space* holds the dynamic nature of legitimizing its former constituent, i.e. conceived and defined by those planners, bureaucrats, engineers who promulgate the very rationale of arrogating this space. In literature written in and around the backdrop of National Emergency, there are several instances of personal experiences and day to day confrontation of living through the times of Emergency, which is where an investment needs to be directed in order for an exposition of *Representational Space* to be surmised. One such incident is cited in the work of Mulk Raj Anand,

“I had gone to see a friend for a drink one evening. The ‘last one for the road’ may have gone to my head. But, as I walked along Amrita Sher-Gill Marg No 1, where I was camping, I suddenly heard a stirring in the hedge of House No 7. I felt that somebody, who had been waiting, was going to follow me. I did not look this side or that, but walked ahead with an uncontrollable thumping of the heart. I tried to rationalize my fear by tracing it to the hangover of the early childhood recoils against ghosts in the night. But there was another sharp rasping sound of leaves crackling and I began to feel, irrationally, that there was someone about. Another sound of what was probably a whiff of breeze and there was terror down my spine. I wanted to look back but could not. I quickened my pace looking straight ahead. As I passed No.5, where an old friend of mine, Dr Katyal, had lived and died, I wanted to stop and turn around, but could not for fear that I would come face to face with the CID man who might be following me. I stepped forward, but before I had lifted my head, a car passed by towards Safdarjung and I stood back startled. That was the limit, I thought, of my neurosis. I hardened my jaws against myself, accused myself of being a coward and turned into No 1. I realized what the fear of fear could mean. I had heard that Sanjay Gandhi was rumoured to have said ‘all uncles must go’...”³⁹

(Mulk Raj Anand, 1978: 33-34)

³⁹ This quote is originally cited in Ameet Parameswaran’s M.Phil Dissertation – *Emergency and ‘Political’ Theatre: A Study of the Emergency in the context of Kerala*. I’m borrowing this quote of Mulk Raj Anand to elaborate my point of *representations of space*. (p-21)

As it cannot be explained in a more lucid manner, when a situation of Emergency is in its full flow, then the act of compliance on the part of citizens following a set of rules of that conceived space leads to an affective overtake. In the above mentioned context, on one hand a sedulous fear is operating whereas on the other hand with the playing of fear *Representations of Space* that is of Emergency is reconfirmed only to necessitate series of repetitive actions from the side of citizens. So, it won't be utterly incorrect to argue that a *lived space* is somewhat a space where the phenomenon of Emergency is garnering its strength because its legitimizing process is happening in this *Representational Space* which goes in tandem with both the conceived space and lived space.

To explicate the third category i.e. *spatial practices*, it will be helpful to caress through the performance and anecdotal references of some particular events of *Vande Mataram* that will serve as a case in point. This production was done by IPTA during Emergency and was also reproduced several times even after that, at various locations throughout Uttar Pradesh. Interestingly, this play never got published and is still kept in its original form with Mr. Nandal Hitaeshi who happens to be the current Secretary of IPTA Allahabad Unit. While interviewing him about the play he recollects,

“Members of IPTA wrote a rough draft with directional inputs from Nandu Thakur who eventually directed the play. It was an open text, or you can even say loosely knit together, actually where a lot of things came in through improvisations but was mainly written by Mushtaq Merchant.”⁴⁰

Engaging more directly about the conception and motivation behind the play, one of IPTA's erstwhile members, Mukhtar Ahmad vividly describes their own *modus operandi* at young

⁴⁰ Personal Interview with Nandal Hitaeshi on 30/11/12. He is also the current Secretary of Progressive Writers' Association (PWA), Unit of Allahabad.

age, equating themselves to a juggler. Or simply put a showman whose work is to keep juggling with whatever he gets. He goes on saying,

“some of us had no work to do so most of the time, every evening we would gather at a local paan shop near the party office chowk, you know that one in Johnsonganj... one day probably, it was Nandu who pricked us about this idea of a play which centres around freedom movement. Thereon, we decided to do a play on India’s Independence movement... Emergency was an apt moment to do this even though as a group we didn’t think about it that much. It is set in the backdrop of Independence struggle, the narrative revolved around a bunch of revolutionaries. During one of their missions, one of them gets caught by the police and is put in jail. Sensing that this captured revolutionary may divulge important information about others if he succumbs to police torture, they send another revolutionary deliberately into the jail. His only aim is to keep a check on their weak link. He has been given the authority to even kill if it becomes necessary.”⁴¹

As the play is set in during the times of freedom movement, what must be kept in mind is the contextualization with the period of Emergency. In doing so, the play tries to recall iconic vestiges about those revolutionary’s lives – their difficult moments in jail, being at the receiving end of police brutality, atrocities and tortures, facing extreme humiliations, serving severe punishments at the whim and fancy of prison administration. Countless historical happenings filled with intense passion of unimaginable sacrifice that took along with itself an entire nation; people who had lived through this era, who had already experienced these conditions of suppression in the past.

Among some of these lionizing references to the past, group members of IPTA finalized on one more particular thing. This was spectacular and theatrical at the same time. It was an onstage presence of two hanging bodies which would constantly suspend in the space of

⁴¹ Personal Interview with Mukhtar Ahmad on 12/11/12 at Lucknow Office of Communist Party of India

performance. Mukhtar Ahmad enthusiastically keeps a pause, waiting to narrate about this entire episode in one go, as soon as a general inquisition is sensed by him. He explains,

“All the characters and their dialogues in the play were supposed to take place in the front section of the stage, and two hanging dead bodies had to be standstill, each at two corners of the stage in the background. We devised a mechanism to hang the body – one rope would hang from the bar of rod above our head at the height of stage roof, which was meant to tangle the neck of the body. Second rope was tied to another beam just beside it which would fall at the rear side of the body. With this one, a small padded makeshift cushion was tied so that the backside of the body could rest upon. When lights would come, our audience could only see two hanging bodies.”⁴²

In these instances, the loci of *transgression* in *spatial practices* can be augured with respect to the onstage representation of two hanging bodies. Firstly, the two hanging bodies are not from a period of present time but still carry a symbolical representation, in which time is another essential factor. Secondly, representations of hanging bodies simply do not confirm a space of Emergency, though it does implicate a meaning in relation to Emergency; creating a strange temporal structure of contemporaneity through hanging bodies. Thirdly, the actors and audiences are participating and experiencing this performance which itself makes it a lived space. Fourth, if in the *order of space*, Emergency is at the top then the act of hanging of bodies is done on the stage where it borrows from *conceived space* and reproduces in *lived space*. Hence a spatial practice corresponds to the above mentioned two categories of space. These practices engulf production and reproduction both at the same time, as they bring together the conceived and the lived space which secures societies conjugality. In Lefebvre’s terminology it’s called *spatial competence* (Lefebvre, 1991: 33). Here a societal conjugality doesn’t necessarily mean a comprehensive coherence between conceived space and lived

⁴² Personal interview with Mukhtar Ahmad, first interview was taken on 14/06/12 and the second on 12/11/12, both at Lucknow office of Communist Party of India. This excerpt is a combination from both the interviews.

space. What it does indicate is that, even though it binds both of these spaces it also keeps them far apart.

To a large extent they are in a dialectical determination with each other. It has a very close similarity with *perceived* space that considers people's perception of their surrounding, of their world, of their space around them. These practices have a major participatory role as they formulate and design everyday social reality⁴³. In a sense, to juxtapose this with the idea of Emergency and the space it coruscates, then *spatial practices* could be engaged as that indiscernible constituent whose purpose is to fulfil neither the conceived space nor the lived space rather to create a *transgressive* moment in the act, in the performance of doing.

To situate the function of *Spatial Practices*, in accordance with the area of work that I am concerned here, i.e. theatre and performance during the period of Emergency highlights these *transgressions*. A *transgression* which creates a vector of new meaning and understanding through acting within the limits but stretching the boundaries of the *order* of things. Wherein, the *order* is about the *conceived space* of Emergency and even the *lived space* during Emergency.

'Freeing' the Body in a Mechanized World: Human-Robot in *Machine*

Throughout Emergency, political theatre in itself became a rare phenomenon. Barring few *exceptions*⁴⁴ at least in the demography of Allahabad, there was a sharp drop of theatre

⁴³ See *The Production of Space*, in the backdrop of urban reality, Lefebvre clarifies about these spatial practices which include systems of communication, e.g. places of gathering, routes, network etc.

⁴⁴ Personal Interview with Prof. Sanjay Dutta Roy on 06/06/2012. According to Prof. Roy, there were quite a few instances of theatre competitions and one of them was held under the aegis of Mr. Ram Kapoor. This All India Short Play Competition took place during 1975-1977. "Usually, it was hosted at Prayag Sangeet Samiti and major theatre halls like, Palace Theatre and Coral Club were booked for shows". While interviewing

practice in comparison with pre-Emergency period. But still, performances in exceptions were taking place, whether it was conventional proscenium plays or those coming from the lineage of *Agit-Prop* theatre. Prof. Sanjay Saxena⁴⁵ sheds some of his thought in this aspect,

“Just before the Emergency was imposed, theatre was mainly aimed at the Congress government and to say in the common parlance, Indira Gandhi’s kitchen cabinet. The ruling party Congress (I) carried the name of Indira as a tag, and its political slogan of was “Garibi Hatao”. The young people led by J.P. found a counter slogan, “Indira Hatao”. The country was moving from one crisis to another as its common masses were living in utter hopelessness. ‘Political theatre’ in such an environment was bound to flourish...the spectrum of political theatre, ranged from naive Gandhianism to Marxism and nihilistic solutions...”⁴⁶

Assessing a sense of *ripe condition* in the above quoted interview, a channelization toward a more *radical theatre* was embedded with respect to the growing discontent in the people. A government crackdown in the form of Emergency, only acted as a deterrent, which possibly disparaged the disgruntlement but could never enucleate it. In some form or the other, theatre was still managing to exist and perform.

But to posit that political theatre was happening everywhere would be a callous generalization. I am limiting the area of concern to a particular place upon which claims are

Kaushal Kishore, he also mentioned that in one of the Annual Contest during Emergency, *Afeem ke Phool* was invited by the organizers of the competition. Hindi Sahitya Sammellan at Allahabad was supposedly maintaining the archive but after going there personally, I did not come upon anything related to the All India Short Play Competition. By enlarge some form of documentation of this sort is yet to be retrieved.

⁴⁵ Prof. Sanjay Saxena teaches in the English department of Allahabad University. As a student of the university, during the period of 70’s he participated in some of the plays. I have included his statements as an observer’s point of view.

⁴⁶ Personal Interview with Prof. Sanjay Saxena on 04/12/2012, at his residence near Ashok Nagar in Allahabad; The interview is in a text format which I wrote as he spoke since he was not comfortable with any kind of recording.

not intended in favour or against any kind of justification, rather to exemplify the very phenomenon of performance in theatre (as also in daily life) to its relationship with a situation like Emergency. What will certainly become fascinating is to situate this sort of relationship in the post-Emergency period, wherein the *order of space* shifts from Emergency as a *conceived space* to the first non-Congress government of post-independent India.

I argue that not only was theatre changing or responding to the current political scenario in the post-Emergency period, but it was also defining a political vocabulary which couldn't be fulfilled or realized before it. In addition to the previous statement this fulfilment is not positing something as the ultimate goal of political theatre; instead I argue that political theatre was never meant to be fulfilled. Because, the act of *transgressions* – even whether it was taking place only and only through/within the logic of representation, did conjure up an uncharted possibilities of aesthetics in theatre.

Inaugurating the production of *Machine*⁴⁷, I will show that Jan Natya Manch⁴⁸ was trying to move along the lines of these *missed possibilities* and were sticking to something which would become a *transgressive aesthetics*. Jan Natya Manch's production of this play will be a case in point to elucidate the proposition of an uncanny figure. At the heart of the street performance of *Machine* is an uncanny figure – a human being in itself, representing a robot. Here the central question will not be that of representation or an *Agit-Prop* agenda of a cultural group. Rather, the mundaneness of human body. Parallel to this idea, it will be demonstrated that *Machine* can be read through *becoming*⁴⁹, where becoming transforms the

⁴⁷ *Machine* was written by the members of JANAM in the year 1978. The specific show happened in the outskirts of Allahabad in the year 1979, when the group was on a tour of Uttar Pradesh.

⁴⁸ Jan Natya Manch also known as JANAM is a Delhi based theatre group which has been active since 1973. Some of their initial street plays are *Hatyare*, *Samrath ko Nahi Dosh Gosain*, *Aurat*, *Raja ka Baja*, to name a few.

⁴⁹ See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus – Capitalism And Schizophrenia*. As Deleuze and Guattari explain, "the process of becoming is not one of imitation or analogy; it is generative of a new way of being that is a function of influences rather than resemblances" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988: 272). Then the

representative body centered thinking into becoming robot, becoming parts of a machine or even becoming voice of these parts that assists to create a fluid identity at the periphery, open to new corridors of *knowledge*.

In their performance of *Machine*, JANAM satirises the mechanisation of the human worker who is reduced to a machine by industry and industrialization process. The body of worker becomes a spot which highlights the schematic infliction of horrifying pain. A short, 13-minute play with a cast of six, acted in a circle with the audience on all sides, first performed on October 15, 1978. Safdar Hashmi records that how the idea of *Machine* emerged,

There is a chemical factory... called Herig-India. The workers there did not have a union. They had two very ordinary demands... They wanted a place where they could park their bicycles and... a canteen where they could get a cup of tea... The management was not willing even to grant these demands... The workers went on strike and the guards opened fire, killing six workers. So this old Communist leader told me about this incident... and he said, 'Why don't you write a play about it?'

(Ghosh, 2007:59)

The then Janata Party government⁵⁰ came down heavily on trade unions and various other voluntary organizations. The Industrial Relation Bill was introduced in Parliament which

process is one of removing the element from its original functions and bringing about new ones. I am borrowing this idea which has been argued in a different context in the paper titled *Deterritorialization, Performative Identity and Uncanny Representation of Woman's Body in the Works of Ana Mendieta* by Muge Ozbay, Inci Eviner, Tefvik Akgun presented at International Congress of Aesthetics 2007, "Aesthetics Bridging Cultures". In this they discuss the works of Cuban American artist Ana Mendieta (1948-1985) and analyses in the context of Butler's performative gender and identity, Deleuze and Guattari's becoming and deterritorialization, and the uncanny that Kristeva borrows from Freud. My point of departure with the understanding of the authors is at their logic of freedom in *transgression* that relates deterritorialization with the transgressive power of becoming as a line of *flight to freedom*. The reason being, that *transgression* is not eternal which one crosses over and puts an end to it, rather it's the potential in one *transgression* that leads to another premise of boundaries.

⁵⁰ The Janata Party (People's Party) was officially formed on 23 January 1977 and came to power on 23 March, 1977 after Fresh elections were called by the Indira Gandhi led government on 18 January, 1977. It saw a magnanimous coalition of a variety of political parties comprising Congress (O), Bhartiya Jan Sangh, Bhartiya Lok Dal, Swatantra Party, Socialist Party, Praja Socialist Party, Utkal Congress, Congress for Democracy,

later on became a symbol of suppression and authoritarianism, allowing the government with unilateral power to muzzle out trade union activities⁵¹. In this backdrop, members of JANAM scripted down the play *Machine*, using it as a metaphor for the capitalist-industrial system.

Sutradhar: Did you see the pace and tempo, tempo and pace of this machine. If pace and tempo are not there then life will not exist. But machine's tempo...That is little awkward, still it has logic. See this carefully – if one part doesn't work then the second one will freeze and if second one freezes then the third one will stop. That's why they work together, stay together – master and servant, criminal and helpless, grindstone and sugarcane...

(Machine, *Uttarardh*, 1983: 2)

As the mechanical voices emerge out of the man-machine in *Machine*, with arms and legs turning into nuts, bolts and wheels, “one finds it scary, suggestive of a scarier future”⁵². Thus creating a human body as the locus of uncanny violence of similarity but distinctly different at the same time. Here the uncanny violence takes upon a figuration on the same level of representation but confides an aperture pertaining to *transgression*. When we look at the

Bhartiya Kranti Dal, Samyukta Socialist Party and many individuals who defected from Congress (R). Jayprakash Narayan, Jivatram Kripalini and Morarji Desai came out as its ideologue during the Emergency period. Morarji Desai went onto become the fourth Prime Minister of India and lead the first non-Congress government at Centre. Other prominent figures of Janata Party government were Jagjivan Ram, Chaudhari Charan Singh, Raj Narain, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani, George Fernandez and Shanti Bhushan all of whom served at different Ministerial portfolios.

⁵¹ See, *Industrial Relation Bill, 1978 – A Critical Overview*. The author, Bagaram Tulpule comments, “On the one hand, government wants workers themselves to take up the leadership of trade unions; on the other hand, it proposes to create a legal maze which will simply baffle workers and deliver them into the hands of employers, bureaucrats and lawyers. Instead of being strong, self-reliant and vibrant organisations of workers, trade unions will be made, at best, almost passive spectators at lengthy legal and administrative proceedings at numerous forums, and at worst, tools in the hands of government to impose its policies and decisions on workers.” Among one of the provisions it stated, “Every trade union shall carry on its management and activities in accordance with the provisions made by or under this Act...”(S 18 [2]), (Tulpule, 1978: 1718). The Bill came on hard as it proposed a complete ban on strikes. Being introduced in the first non-Congress government and that too after Emergency was lifted, the bill was supposed to be inclusive in terms of working condition, minimum wages, relaxation in labour laws. Instead the Industrial Relation Bill of 1978 stood out as a more regressive, anti-union and on the whole persuading an anti-people policy by the Janata Party government.

⁵² India Together, ‘Remembering Janam’, *India Together* <<http://www.indiatogether.org/2006/aug/soc-hashmi.htm>>, accessed on 5 May, 2013

performance of *Machine* from 1978, when it was first performed, till date, we can see that this performance still clutches a way to express their reactions against the fiction of industrialization/modernity projected on human bodies and to reclaim these bodies from the status quo.

Actor 1: Together... together with what? Togetherness with whom... Who understands this togetherness? I receive bitterness, whose bitterness? Oh...bitterness of landlord, kick from mill owner, hatred of ration broker, anger in milkman and hostility from policeman! I have gone mad. Forgot to tell you who I am, because I'm sad. I am a worker... part of this machine. Very useful but still useless.... important but insignificant. I work for the owner of this machine but who cares, atleast he doesn't. Ask for payment it's a problem, ask for holiday there is trouble, and appeal for bonus no way! It's suicide. Togetherness... (Uttarardh, 1983: 2-3)

To construe a *transgression* within the aspect of mechanical violence and sudden shift of meaning through an uncanny figure like that of human-robot, I will use Judith Butler's argument on gender which according to her is constituted through performing. As Butler would say in relation with gender – “repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts, to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler, 1990: 33) – a figure of human-robot would fulfil this *being robot*, that does not have a cohesive meaning or entity.

From the above quotation, an inference needs to be drawn out – the incongruity of Actor 1, coming out from the structure of a whole (machine as one) and still promulgate its difficulty as a part of the machine, resonates it *being-robot's part*. As for this moment it is no longer a part of the machine in theatrical representation which ultimately allows alleviation to another stage of *being-robot-body*. So we have four tiers of body – first, a *being human body* of the performer, second *being human-robot*, third *being robot's part* and lastly *being robot-body*.

An exegesis of such a proportion throws up a pertinent question – is it possible to delineate and attack the very identity of the category of *body*, or is it a case that different strata of body form a corporeal style that generates a figment of *basic body*? Would it be apt to say that *body* as a performative act is not someone's decision that is actualized or materialized by an individual autonomy; not even directed by those cultural codes that are made obligatory for inscription on an *inert body*.

What can be then seen as a marker of an entirely new contemplation encircling *body*, will be some kind of *heave*⁵³ that nullifies those arguments and understandings of corporeality as something which is only specified within the logic of representation. In this regard when I say *heave* it implies that the *body* is like a pull away element, through which this *body* reveals an imitative structure of body in general. Then body is not simply fulfilling its representational function and is moving away from *body being robot* manifestation. In these movements of transformation lies the unintentional anxiety which needs to be discovered and acknowledged from unknown territory. Accordingly, performative element in the play of *Machine* can also be found beyond the uncanny figure of *body*.

Moreover it must be clarified that *body* can only be performed and it doesn't have an original coherent consistency. As in the case mentioned above, *being-robot* and *being-robot's part* would propel distinct significations. This in turn implies that it's impossible to presuppose that the *being human-robot* has a permanent and *basic body* of unified meaning. Hence, each and every different *body* of separate tiers have a non-homogenous meaning. From these non-homogenous meanings of one another an internal disjunction is produced that pushes new vectors through *transgression*.

⁵³ The dictionary meaning of heave is to raise or lift with effort. Thus a body serves as a propellant which acts not to confine its own singular meaning. <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/heave?s=t>> accessed on 02/05/2013

Here I would assert that *Machine* performed a *body* that is not predefined or homogeneous. Both its work and identity are transformed through the acts of *being human-robot* while rejecting a unified meaning. Numerous identities are acted and again re-enacted each time which in turn reduces the unilateralism of identity as an isolated category. Thus every time this is done it's a double count of the minimum, where the minimum is not a circumscribed given, rather an open one; open for multiplication. When a robot's body is represented in the work of *Machine*, it is doubly uncanny and fits in to the non-traceable zone of representation, as the body of a robot and that of a body itself. According to Safdar Hashmi,

“The machine, created very simply by human figures, is the symbolic representation of capitalism. The worker, the capitalist and the security officer are all parts of the machine; they are complementary parts of a system founded upon the exploitation of one by the other”⁵⁴

Hence from their very inception, an unequal co-existence is in the fray. A play like *Machine* postulates the affirmation of a *free being body*, which declines to be mechanized. Only that this *free body* doesn't claim to freedom of a transcendental kind, after which there are no limits. This *body* of free being can only gain a momentary lapse, existing between the cracks of *being body* and *being robot*. Its dependence on the other motivates a unity of meaning in the case of machine being created by different body parts but leaving an interstice of hybridity and differences. In this sense a figure of a robot does more than mere representing a quite-essential meaning. Along the transformation of different tiers, body's representation becomes so fearful, yet so mundane that we hardly learn to unpack these *transgressions*. On the one hand there can be a realization of the *transgression* but those realizations are only

⁵⁴ JANAM, 'Machine', *Jan Natya Manch*, <<http://www.jananatyamanch.org/node/26>>, accessed on 30 May, 2013.

possible with another act of *associating-body*. Nonetheless body association could profess about a *free-body* that can provide a meaning to it, in the domain of possibility.

Gendered Work and Value of Strike: Linking Blockages in Production

If *Machine* throws up questions of transgressive aesthetics, pertaining to body and mediated via human robots then a play *Aurat*⁵⁵ certainly came up with complex issues of patriarchy, gender discrimination and domestic violence. In this section I will take up the case of *Aurat* to chalk out these issues of patriarchy, domestic violence and gender discrimination which broadened the horizon of *politics* in comparison with *Machine*. Thus an exposition of a gamut of inter-class relations gets challenged instead of a passing remark; usually taken for granted and secondary to *larger problems* of class exploitation.

Aurat was first done in 1979, and remains one of JANAM's most successful street plays. The play's first scene starts with a girl astounding the audience somewhat in an intermittent stylization, as it begins with Safdar Hashmi's translation of the Iranian school teacher Marzia Ahmed Oskoui's poem⁵⁶,

Actress: I am a mother.

⁵⁵ In his book, *A History of the Jan Natya Manch* Arjun Ghosh writes that, "Aurat (Woman) was created for the North Indian Working Womens' Conference which was held on March 25, 1979. It was created through a process of discussions followed by writing bits of the dialogue. The play was readied in ten days. Aurat is JANAM's most successful play till date. There have been over 2,500 shows of it".

⁵⁶ Janam, 'Aurat', Jan Natya Manch, <<http://www.jananatyamanch.org/node/26>>, accessed 30 April, 2013

I'm a sister

A good wife

I am a woman

A woman who from time immemorial...

Actor 1: running...on the scorching sand of a desert

Actress: I am that working woman

Actor 4: who with her bare hands turns the wheel of giant machines

Machine which sucks out life everyday in front of her eyes

From whose blood, beastly bones quench their thirst

And brokers of capitalism gain when her blood spills over...

Actress: I'm then that woman

Actor 6: whose hands have faced the brunt of pricking pain

Body has been beaten to death by your endless and shameful labour

Her skin reflects that of a desert

And whose hair smells off factory chimneys

(Uttarardh, 1983: 33)

These poesies of quatrains establish many voices of woman and not a particular woman. As the central character of actress is accompanied by supporting male characters, they take cues from the actress to register the plight of women by completing her dialogues. It then lends an intercutting of reciprocal disenchantment (both men and women participating in the dialogues) with the way women as a historical figure has undergone through different epochs. Their shift in subjective positioning while performing draws an attention towards an

engagement which tries to empathize with a non-parochial understanding of the gender question.

Sutradhar: let us tell you a story, a short story, short story of a small girl.

Woman: small a stands for anaar, big A for aam, aam – anaar, no anaar – aam

Father: munni... where are you? I asked you to get my chilam...

Woman: a for anaar, A for aam

Father: it's not your school, now get my chilam, it's been an hour. How long will I keep waiting?

Woman: I was trying to mug it up. Our school master says to learn in the house. If unable to understand then ask from your father.

Father: Ask your father! Ask your father then stay in the house and do work of the house.

Woman: no I want to go there...

Father: keep your mouth shut. Sending your brother to school is giving me a hard time...

(*Uttarardh*, 1983: 35)

What we see in the performance is that after foregrounding the initial ordeal with poetic epithet, the first episode of the play conflates didactic exclamation about the harsh existence of a girl child. Adjacent to it a *sutradhaar* (jester like figure who at times switches his function from being the narrator to a central character in the play; often delivering puns with a sense of wit) abruptly cuts the narrative and appeals the audience to listen to a girl and her father's short story – a conversation between a girl and her father on whether she should go to school or work at the house. The kid is constantly trying to memorize what does 'A' stands for and the father is mocking at her that she should do something productive for their

household. While the section suggests an insight into normative structure of family set-up, the example it gives also portrays those dominant narratives of productive labour. Thus it exposes not only a fall out of patriarchal logic, rather poses a wide range of questions related to women *labour*⁵⁷ that are not counted as work. The next two stories deal with the figure of woman being portrayed one as a wife who is mentally and physically abused by her husband. She is ill-treated from the very beginning when she is forced to keep her vow in the form of marriage approval from the priest as a social practice. The directive she has from these societal institutions is to keep her allegiance to the family, whatever the condition may be. Her only respite is with her children but can't help herself thinking that they will also act like her husband to somebody in the future. While the other story seeks to frame out, somewhat obliquely, the inaccessibility of higher education due to exorbitant fee charges in universities and colleges.

Woman: Good morning sir, can you give me admission? I want to study.

Actor 2: but it written here that your father's income is Rs. 250/-

Actor 6: do you know about Jules Brinar's child psychology?

⁵⁷ In conventional Marxist understanding labour, Marx himself clarifies two forms of labour. One, as Abstract labour and another as Concrete labour. Marx first advanced this distinction in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) stating that, "On the one hand all labour is, speaking physiologically, an expenditure of human labour power, and in its character of identical abstract human labour, it creates and forms the value of commodities. On the other hand, all labour is the expenditure of human labour power in a special form and with a definite aim, and in this, its character of concrete useful labour, it produces use values... At first sight a commodity presented itself to us as a complex of two things – use value and exchange value. Later on, we saw also that labour, too, possesses the same twofold nature; for, so far as it finds expression in value, it does not possess the same characteristics that belong to it as a creator of use values. I was the first to point out and to examine critically this twofold nature of the labour contained in commodities... this point is the pivot on which a clear comprehension of political economy turns". Whereas one strand of feminist critique of Marxian value theory asserts that the division between abstract and concrete labour, somewhere presumes the worth of public production as more important than private reproduction. For someone like Silvia Federici, she critiques the theory of *precarious labour* put forward by Antonio Negri, Paolo Virlo and Michael Hardt. See *Precarious Labor: A Feminist Viewpoint* in which, "she claims reproductive labour is a hidden continent of work and struggle the movement must recognize in its political work, if it is to address the key questions we face in organizing for an alternative to capitalist society." Another strand of feminist critique challenges the very definition of work as something good to society, both socially and politically. In her book *The Problem with Work*, Kathi Weeks presents that the presumption of work as a given, has "depoliticized" the possibility of challenging the very idea of work. According to her, our acceptance of waged labour as the fundamental basis of betterment and just society limits the radical thrust, which believes in the liberation from labour.

Actor 4: it costs 80 rupees, and everyone has to buy it, its compulsory.

Actor 6: Our College's fee per month is 20 rupees.

Actor 1: 15 rupees for building fund.

Actor 5: electricity and maintenance cost is 10 rupees

Actor 2: In total 45 rupees. Can you afford this?

Woman: yes sir, I'll do something or the other. I will pay from my tuition salary.

(Uttarardh, 1983: 39-40)

So, whether it is a prosaic narration of an estranged wife/mother or that of a college going girl, the intricacies of her lifetime confrontation gets woven together. In the above mentioned case these confrontations are revealed through the bombardment of procedural enquiry of the selection committee. Though the emphasis is palpably on monetary matter, what cannot be neglected is the very composition it forms to create a hostile atmosphere. The switch from previous act to this one leads to non-chronological order of questioning among the actors that gives a sense of a melange of unsettling para-narrative. As the other actors outline a circle around the girl interviewee, their criss-cross and overlapping dialogues doesn't allow a continuous free flow of addressing to a particular question. A technique which can dismantle anybody's calmness set aside the interviewee's reaction in the play.

As the play progresses it becomes self-evident that elsewhere the girl/woman character are ageing with time, though not exactly following an exact linear pattern. Moving from the nascent age of childhood her appendage to assorted situations in a lifetime, leads to face the present situation of womanhood – the daughter is married off in her early age and as she grows older, has a child, later on being physically abused by her husband. One may propound the basic motto of the play as educationalist and/ or propagandist. Wherein, consciousness

building through erudition has been seen over the years as the main central focus of line of argument standing with agreement or disapproving it vehemently.

But that would be too overarching, in the sense that though being an *Agit-Prop* tool, the labour that is put into such a production doesn't thrive upon the confirmation of an end product. As participant, they themselves are working in order to produce and consume labour susceptible to commodification. Moloyshee Hashmi stresses this one point, when being asked about that what it is exactly in her opinion which makes *Agit-Prop* the way it is?, she responds in promptness,

“These names are very old; they have been there for over hundred years, agitation propaganda or Agit-Prop is not new...how do I view, I think it also has its own value but not all theatre is Agit-Prop and all theatre need not be Agit-Prop. You can turn around and say that any play that is political is Agit-Prop...today anything that is political, anything that is talking about issues is termed as Agit-Prop and it is termed very negatively. Implying that, it is necessarily of very poor quality/aesthetics. That is factually not the case; (a) it is certainly not the case when it began...I think Agit-Prop has more to do with the purpose and to some extent with the form I suspect, in certain phases in certain countries and not at all to do with the quality. So, a good Agit-Prop play can be not very creative and wonderfully creative like any other play. In certain times in India, it usually has meant that has anything to do with issues, which is done with less arrangement, which doesn't require too much effort...”⁵⁸

If then *Agit-Prop* theatre has its own *value*⁵⁹, it would be quite an invigorating juncture to think about the moment of *strike* in the play. Juxtaposing value and strike could then certainly

⁵⁸ Personal Interview with Moloyshee Hashmi on 17/08/2012 at May Day Cafe, Shadi Khampur, New Delhi

⁵⁹ Here value is considered not in an economic sense or that related to value theory which considers a synonymous name i.e. axiology. Where axiology is primarily concerned with classifying what things are good, and how good they are. For instance, a traditional question of axiology concerns whether the objects of value are subjective psychological states, or objective states of the world. < <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/value-theory/>>. Instead, it would come nearest to and stand for 'meaning-making' as proposed by David Graeber

lead towards a crucial dimension of work as such. Until now, all the other stories were knit together as an exposition, which were not calling for a deliberate action; it can also be seen as episodic, presenting different facets of women's struggle. The last story is in the backdrop of an old women factory worker when she is pushed out of her job.

Owner: aye, why have you stopped working? Start working, it's my order.

Worker: work will not resume till you take her back.

Owner: didn't I make it clear? There is no work for this old hag.

All: then it will be a total strike.

(Old woman picks up a red flag)

(Uttarardh, 1983: 44)

Critically looking into the text of the play I will be suggesting that it laid the contours of these maladies by placing hard-hitting experiences of girls and women in the societal structure of patriarchy. Among other things the moment of *Strike*⁶⁰ will be a centrifugal force to

who attempts to synthesize the insights of Karl Marx and Marcel Mauss. He sees value as a model for human 'meaning-making'. Starting with Marxist definitions of consumption and production, he introduces Mauss's idea of 'objects that are not consumed' and posits that the majority of human behaviour consists of activities that would not be properly categorized as either consumption or production. In the context of the interview with Moloysree Hashmi, value goes side by side with its meaning.

⁶⁰ Strike is usually used in the form of labour/worker strike, which is a work stoppage caused by the mass refusal of employees to work. There has been a lot of debate on the form of strike in itself and historically it draws a lot from numerous examples of revolutionary movements. Among other writings, Rosa Luxemburg and Walter Benjamin have widely discussed Strike from their own understanding. In *Reform or Revolution & The Mass Strike*, Luxemburg argues that the experience of the revolution which is an actual event driven by the mass struggles of working class could solve the problem of how to push social democracy forward. Her understanding of the mass strike was historically grounded as she had visited Russia during the 1905 Uprising. In chapter four, "The Interaction of the Political and the Economic Struggle" she argues, "It is the living pulse-beat of the revolution and at the same time it's most powerful driving wheel. In a word, the mass strike, as shown to us in the Russian Revolution, is not a crafty method discovered by subtle reasoning for the purpose of making the proletarian struggle more effective, but the method of motion of the proletarian mass, the phenomenal form of the proletarian struggle in the revolution." She saw mass strike "as an indispensable element of the revolutionary process that was totally different and out of clutch from trade union bureaucracy." <<http://www.counterfire.org/index.php/theory/marx-101/16233-marx-101-an-introduction-to-rosa-luxemburgs-the-mass-strike>>

contemplate with. Hitherto, *strike* in common usage has come in hand majorly within various workers' movements/struggles across the globe. But strike has been generally seen as only in terms of demands being achieved at the end, where strike in itself became a means to attain such a goal. My point of assertion would be to invoke the moment of *Strike* in the text of the play as a *metonymy*⁶¹ – advocating that the operative culmination in a situation like *Strike* is a complete halt of work (even though it's momentary) and stands at a paradox that of withdrawal and withhold of work.

I look through these questions as new limits, at standoff. In this context of strike, which calls for a suspension of work, how will it be tenable to seek a *value of strike* in theatre? In the performance, does the raising of red flag constitute only a symbolical gesture? Or the *value of strike* stands in sharp contrast with the representation of strike in the play? During the enactment of this scene, the actors form an arc while protesting and giving slogans against their owner, stating that they have a demand. Now the owner rejects their proposal, they call for a strike where the old woman corresponds by raising the red flag.

Then in the representational sense of theatre, the actors are directing for a moment of complete halt of work while they are themselves in action. Thus, even though a

The idea of *Strike* in Benjamin comes from a slightly different angle. He takes the cue from Georges Sorel's classification of strike in two sub-categories. One as political strike and the other as proletarian general strike, because for him their relation to violence makes them stand apart from each other. (Reflections, supra note 1: 291). He comment on the defenders of political strike saying, "The political general strike...demonstrates how the state will lose none of its strength, how power is transferred from the privileged to the privileged, how the mass of producers will change their masters.' In contrast to this political general strike., the proletarian general strike sets itself the sole task of annihilating state violence." In Afformative, Strike Werner Hamacher focuses that for Benjamin, the proletarian general strike was a pure means thus involving "pure political violence" seeking strike in itself as "unmediated mediacy". Hamacher goes onto argue that the proletarian general strike is simply situated outside any means-end dichotomy, hence ruling out the logic of positing as it is in the case of political strike, where political action is determined by the change in existent socio-economic laws. Thus "de-poses" any positing of relations; nullifying one condition being pitted against the other. Hamacher terms it as afformative, where there is a suspension of positioning – be it juridical, political or social.

⁶¹ A figure of speech that consists of the use of the name of one object or concept for that of another to which it is related, or of which it is a part, as "scepter" for "sovereignty," or "the bottle" for "strong drink," or "count heads (or noses)" for "count people". <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/metonymy>>, accessed on 03/05/2013

representation of strike in a play like *Aurat* may focus on the *Agit-Prop* element, it nevertheless is overflowing and spilling new corridors of possible meanings. On the one hand, performance of strike in itself is redefining the subject position of the proletariat by presenting a woman figure. Whereas at the same time delimiting strike as a political action constricted within politics of ideology – representing strike in a play is not only symbolical, rather pushes the idea of strike as an act of inaction to actions in theatre which can stand for the representation of such inactions.

The figure of worker is not as generic as in *Machine*. The poem at the start, of women being machines can be used to elaborate a different sense of women being machines. Possibly a consorted clash of such a moment – atleast in the case of *strike*, where representation of inaction stands at a paradox with the actions of theatre can portend toward a new sense of envisaging the very definition of *political* in political theatre. In this scenario, then the moment of *Strike* could be seen as a *metonymy that* advocates a complete halt of work and which also signals the political through the theatrics of withdrawal and withhold of work. At one level, theatre which claims to be political in nature must not be assessed either on the basis of its form or the content which it is supposedly expected to deliver to the audience. Instead it is the coming together of these two mutually inclusive yet exclusive elements in the domain of their performance inside a theatrical space which makes it political. Thus not only being contained within the logics of representation but usurping its modalities to generate an opening-up of discourses.

CHAPTER III

Political Theatre in *Now Time*: Missed Possibilities in Transgressions



Fig (I)



Fig (II)

In Fig (I) of the photograph provided by Pankaj Srivastav, some of the group members are seen singing a poem – in total ten members from the group are standing adjacent to each other almost forming an arc. In the backdrop, bystanders and people who are listening to the song distinguish the frame as their autonomy for being an audience doesn't conflate with that of the group members. At the right most corner, two of the group members have music instruments in their hand probably *khadasa*⁶², while *dhapli*⁶³ being played by Mr. Srivastav himself keeping with tempo. In the centre, one member is holding a book from where he is reading out and others follow him in chorus.

While an another snapshot of the same performance, Fig (II) is seen as an extension, where group members are walking down the path lane as audience formation in this frame is quite distinct from the earlier one – they are, as if forming a moving alliance with the actors of the group. These include passersby, kids, people who had earlier gathered around initially when the group members were singing in a static position. Besieging the actors, their interpolation in dynamicity with the group members also doesn't follow those strict codes of an organized *juloos*, where columns are pre-ordained to cut off the dilettantish vulnerability of disintegration. Neither it is in the form of a demonstration nor protest where a resultant outcome is desired. Instead, this assembling of people here can be seen in terms of what Judith Butler conceives as a title in one of her article – *Bodies in Alliance*⁶⁴.

⁶² Khadasa is a music instrument, which has a rectangular wooden structure and metaalic jingles are threaded between the two parallel panels of the wooden structure.

⁶³ Dhapli comes closest to that of the musical instrument known as Tambourine. The only difference in Dhapli from that with Tambourine is that it doesn't have metallic round shape discs.

⁶⁴ Judith Butler, *Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street* <<http://eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en>>, accessed on 25/06/2013

Butler expounds on the idea of bodies⁶⁵ coming together during protests and demonstrations and laying down a claim in the public arena. But she refuses to gulp the pre-conceived character of a public space where the over dependency of historical streets, squares or for that matter an institution of architectural space can only confine a political action. As these supports of architectural space are nonetheless essential, yet a metamorphosis can happen through material reification of the public spaces of alleys and backstreets. Then in some sense, the bodies which are making those alley and backstreets a public space, have a distinct relation – an alliance that creates life, asserting its claim for these spaces⁶⁶.

When asked about the space they used to explore, Pankaj Srivastav recounts,

“When you are doing a political play is it necessary that you have to perform at a tea shop in a corner or a *jhuggi*?”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ In an interview with Irene Costera Meijer and Baukje Prins titled, *How Bodies Come to Matter: An Interview with Judith Butler*, both the interviewers in their introduction to the interview writes that Butler’s “prime concern are not those of the *conceptually pure* philosopher but of a theorist in a much more political and strategic vein. She agrees that her claims concerning the existence of abject bodies are downright contradictory. But, so she tells us, they are contradictory on purpose as performative formulas, they are meant to enforce or invoke this *impossible* existence.” When asked that “how would she want her ideal reader to read *Bodies That Matter*: as a form of political fiction or as a diagnostic philosophical inquiry?” Butler replies, “my work has always been undertaken with the aim to expand and enhance a field of possibilities for bodily life...to conceive of bodies differently seems to me part of the conceptual and philosophical struggle that feminism involves, and it can relate to questions of survival as well.

⁶⁶ See, *Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street* where Butler explains that Hannah Arendt’s exposition and emphasis on “space of appearance” seeks to ascertain that the “true” space lies “between the people” (Arendt, *The Human Condition*) but what it does exclude is the assisting nature of tangible things, in support of these actions. In the case of Arendt, a space has its speciality according to those who act with each other – “wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is the various forms in which the public realm can be organized.” See, *Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street*. This view, in some sense does take into account the conditions of bodies for plurality in the “space of appearance”. While the above mentioned line of thought in Arendt accounts for a certain speciality of the conditions it adds to the point, by suggesting that those bodies which are prohibited cannot create space of appearance, constitutively. Butler points out this nuance in the favour of those bodies which are deprived from this so called space from the very beginning. Thus according to Butler, we must rethink this “space of appearance” with an intention of comprehending the claims of protests and uprisings, especially in the times in which we are living in.

⁶⁷ Personal Interview with Pankaj Srivastav on 09/06/2013, at his residence near New Ashok Nagar, New Delhi

In a similar way, when the group members of DASTA are moving across a not so visited location, its intervention is not because of the difference of location but because, that performs the space of public. They perform their rightful right of a space as public. Whether it is a tea-shop, beetle shop or any place their implementation of alliance with bystanders, kids, women, walking beside them and creating a space of public which to them is unavailable under a situation of curfew. Their body on these by-lanes lives in that space which could not overpower but in an alliance with the actors, performs its rightful space politically. Hence their affirmative appearance not only challenges the status quo of curfew but also asserts “a right to have rights” (Butler, 2011: 7). It must be also put forth that an alliance with theatre group members can only initiate or act as an adjuvant system which cannot be deducted to individuality, precisely because these theatre group members also happen to be in alliance with each other, assisted by material fill-ups of DASTA.

Sangam and its Contradiction

This segment of the chapter will try to traverse through the poem – *Sangam ki Dharti Par Dekho* which was written by Neelabh⁶⁸ and performed by the group DASTA⁶⁹ within the performance of the play *Shahar Khamosh Nahi* (The City is not Quiet) in the aftermath of

⁶⁸ Neelabh Ashk is a playwright, novelist, poet and also a critic of Hindi literature. He had a short stint in BBC during his early years. *Pratimaano ka Purohit, Poora Ghar Ek Kavita, Jungle Khamosh Hai, Ishwar ko Moksh* and *Shok ka Sukh* are some of his acclaimed & published body of work. His father was Upendranath Ashk, who also was a playwright, novelist and short story writer and received the Sangeet Natak Akademi award in the year 1965. Neelabh Ashk currently lives in New Delhi.

⁶⁹ DASTA was formed in the year 1978 and its founder members were associated with Communist Party of India [Marxist-Leninist]. Its first play was *Hum Na Sahenge Zor Kisika* in that very year. Over a period of time, throughout '80's it came up with productions like – *Itihaas Gawaah Hai, Janta Pagal Ho Gayi Hai, Shahar Khamosh Nahi, Exception and Rule(Niyam ka Randaa, Apwaad ka Fandaa), Chor Chor Chor and Sarkari Saand* after the assassination of the significant political theatre practitioner, Safdar Hashmi of Jan Natya Manch in 1989. The group worked with a different name in Varanasi, known as Jan Sanskriti Manch which constituted Kala Commune in the year 1995 – a place where artists varying from painters, writers, theatre actors, musicians etc would live together and sustain their livelihood.

1986 communal riots⁷⁰ in Allahabad. Set in the backdrop of riots, the play has interludes in the form of direct political comments against the establishment including the political class and law enforcement forces. Without an iota of doubt, the text of the poem is embedded with propagandist mode of reaction to the communal riots which not only raises some very specific issues but also accuses the people in power to be the main culprit for permeating a riot like situation.

Paanch police thaano mein dekho, loot-paat ka raaj

Sangam ki dharti par dekho, dangaa bhadka aaj

Har nukkad par Police-PAC, har kone par fauj

Janta mare bhook se lekin, afsar maare mauj

Stemming from the use of rhetoric in *Agit-Prop* theatre, opening lines of the poem takes on administrative high-handedness, irrational deployment of military forces in matters related to civilian unrest and the deplorable condition of those who ultimately suffer at the dispense of negligence. On one hand, it tries to shift the public anger onto that stratum which remains insensitive and safe; the poem latches itself to a certain kind of purity with *sangam*⁷¹, as if trying to posit unacceptability towards segregation of human beings on the lines of religious-ideological fanaticism. This emphasis on “sangam ki dharti par” aims to propose an exclamatory disbelief, that how could an intolerance toward a particular minority population of the society be possible and that too in the land of blessed *sangam*?

⁷⁰ See, Sumit Sarkar et al., *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*. The authors addresses that communal riots, “at Meerut, Maliana, Delhi, Bhagalpur and many other places have changed the very meaning of communal riots changed into something very like genocide with connivance.” This citation is taken from Uma Chakravarty et al., ‘Communalization of Khurja’, *The Hindu*, 17 June, 1991.

⁷¹ Sangam refers to the convergence of three rivers – Ganga, Yamuna and the invisible-mythical Saraswati at Allahabad. According to Hindu religious tradition it is considered to be a divine place.

Bam-Pistaul chalakkar gunde, moochein aenth kar ghoomo

Tel kaan mein daal prashasan, satta mad mein hai jhoomo

Police aur adhikaari aa kar pakde sabke kaan

Bharat mein kya kaam tumhara, bhaago Pakistan

Moreover the poem places *sangam* as a centrifugal reference point that not only denotes for the confluence of different streams of river but also weaves specific parables of corruption and indifferent attitude of bureaucrats towards the common masses. In effect, the poem brings in disparate yet interconnected concerns of everyday struggle in the life of toiling masses – intercutting with a transposition of sacred-cum-secular imagery of *sangam*. Given a strong presence of Hindu right wing element, the politico-religious fervour of Allahabad has conveniently used the bureaucratic set-up of civil servants especially in the police force to meet their ends.

Literature around this period has ample evidence that deliberates in the direction of communal hatred being whipped by a particular section and corroborated by the law enforcement agencies. Among one of them is *Shahar Mein Curfew*. Vibhuti Narayan Rai⁷² in his novel *Shahar Mein Curfew* vividly talks about this precise nature of prejudice among police officers and how it is also consciously allowed to percolate in the rank and file of police force. Being an IPS officer himself and posted as SSP Allahabad during the '86 riots, Mr. Rai accounts the horrific, sad and pathetic response of the police. And particularly the role of police and the PAC (Provincial Armed Constabulary) is revealed to deliberately encourage communal frenzy, aided by a consorted effort of non-representation of minorities

⁷² Vibhuti Narayan Rai has served on various posts in the police department. He is also an acclaimed writer of Hindi Literature with five novels in his bag – *Ghar*, *Shahar Mein Curfew*, *Kissa Loktantra*, *Tabaadla*, *Prem ki Bhoot Katha*. *Shahar Mein Curfew* has been translated in Assamese, Oriya, Bengali, Urdu, Punjabi, Marathi and Kannada language. In 1991, this novel had to face the loathing of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) which stamped it as an anti-Hindu literature. In 1998 he got to publish his dissertation under the title *Combating Communal Conflict* which deals with the perception of police neutrality during communal conflict and ponders over the relationship between minority communities and other institutions headed by the Indian State.

in the bureaucracy. Interestingly without a direct reference to the *gurus* of Hindutva, he manages to indicate an omnipresence of these ideologues working from behind the curtains. The poem *Sangam ki Dharti Par*, somewhat extracts a similar kind of derision clearly pointing towards the systemic violence of conducting searches and a sort of explicit criminality; with an application of coercive methods undertaken by police authorities against the minority section.

DASTA and the Framework of 'Larger' Politics

Hitherto, the terrain of political theatre in the present dissertation has been an attempt to address some key issues – be it the body of work and idea behind *Waiting for Godot* and *Andher Nagri* or the performance of *Afeem ke Phool* by IPTA just after the declaration of Emergency; the relationship between State and theatre during a situation such as Emergency proliferates itself into an excess. Through the example of *Vande Mataram*'s exposition of hanging bodies with respect to spatial practices, I have shown how the act of transgressions in lived spaces of performance in theatre channelizes new trajectories of meaning. The two productions of JANAM i.e. *Machine* and *Aurat* deals with two different complexities, in which the former one has been guided by the *transgressive* body of human robot and its mundaneness while the latter one focuses on the moment of strike as a metonymy.

This section of the dissertation will try to bring in DASTA's theatre practice, which came into existence during the post-Emergency period and remained quite active throughout the 1980's. DASTA which was working as a cultural front of PSO (Progressive Student Organization), which had its affiliation with the then Communist Party of India [Marxist-

Leninist] led by Vinod Mishra faction⁷³. In the following pages, I intend to overlay a brief summary of an interview with the purpose of not confiding a history of the group but to keep in mind a sense, about the milieu of theatre practice in the geo-political region of Allahabad. In turn this would not only help to keep a reference point for further explanation and clarification but also assist the effort to pick up the shift lines in the group's decision for a different aesthetic choice in comparison to those of JANAM's and various other theatre

⁷³In the aftermath of Naxalbari uprising, the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries was formed which was then followed up with the formation of Communist Party of India [Marxist-Leninist] on 22 April, 1969. The CPI [ML] conducted its First Congress in Calcutta in the month of May 1970 where in-total a 21 member Central Committee was formed, headed by its first General Secretary, Charu Mazumdar. Following Charu Mazumdar's death in 1972, CPI [ML] started splintering into numerous other outfits. A booklet titled, *CPI (ML) - The Firm Defender of the Revolutionary Legacy of Indian Communists* was published during 1991 by CPI [ML] in their central organ – Liberation which mentions, "By the middle of 1972, the Party had suffered almost total paralysis. The entire central leadership was virtually decimated. The remaining Party forces were all lying scattered and fragmented. And on the question of the Party's line, there was confusion all around. At this juncture, a new Central Committee was organised on 28 July, 1974, the second anniversary day of Comrade Charu Mazumdar's martyrdom. The committee consisted of only three members – Comrade Jauhar, the General Secretary, and Comrades Vinod Mishra and Raghu (Swadesh Bhattacharya)."

IPF stands for Indian People's Front which was formed in 1982. The above mentioned document, in detail also states the logic behind the formation of IPF, with a sub-heading – *Formation of IPF: A New Leap in Political Assertion*. "A meeting of thirteen CR (Communist Revolutionaries) organisations including almost all the major factions of CPI (ML) was convened by our Party in 1981. That remains the first and last attempt for unity of the movement. At the same time, we embarked upon large-scale interactions with the emerging intermediate forces of non-party mass movements. All these efforts finally culminated in the formation of the Indian People's Front through a three-day conference from April 24 to 26, 1982, in Delhi. In December 1982, the Party organised its Third Congress in a village in the Giridih district of Bihar. This Congress was fairly representative in character and it elected a Central Committee of 17 full and 8 alternative members. The CC re-elected Comrade VM as the General Secretary. After a fierce debate, the Congress gave its green signal to the tactics of participation in elections. However, it reaffirmed the Party's resolve to grasp the peasant resistance struggles as the key link, and to keep all our parliamentary activities subordinated to extra-parliamentary mass struggles. The 1985 assembly elections in Bihar were the first polls contested by the Party, of course, under the IPF banner."

<http://www.cpiml.org/archive/vm_swork/54cpi_ml_the_firm_defender.htm>, accessed on 12/07/2013

Another document under the index of "Review of National Situation and Party Policy" – *Central Committee's Message to the IPF Rally held on 8 October 1990*, corroborates the role of IPF as, "IPF is the other name for the most consistent movement for revolutionary democracy, which has sought to encompass not only the forces and struggles of the traditional Left, the struggles of workers and peasants, but all trends of democracy in India, be it a movement on issues of national minorities, women or environment, be it a campaign for religious reforms or civil liberties. Our Party is committed to this orientation of IPF for the independence of IPF. It is indeed a unique experiment in the history of Indian communist movement. It is our ardent appeal to all the forces of democracy who are not blindly anti-communist: Cooperate with us for the success of this experiment."

<http://www.cpiml.org/archive/vm_swork/3central_committee.htm>, accessed on 12/07/2013

groups which were active during that period; placing the context of various texts in its own socio-politico understanding.

Interlinking to a previous reference of Janata Party government, if the Industrial Relation Bill of 1978 became the backdrop for the production of *Machine*, then the rise of Hindu-communal right wing assertion in the social fabric during 1980's, opened up serious questions about the gentry of the geo-political region of Allahabad. Not to see this as a passing remark, it's indeed glaring to take a note that the shift in terms of approach toward the subject matter in political theatre became pertinent. This doesn't mean that earlier the subject matter wasn't taken into consideration; instead the stress is on a given political scenario (communal hate mongering even by the custodians of law-executive apparatus), where a political theatre like DASTA had to place itself vis-à-vis an aesthetico-politico⁷⁴ choice.

K.K. Pandey mentions in the interview about the performance of *Shahar Khamosh Nahi* as a play which comes closest to the English equivalent of droll⁷⁵,

⁷⁴ See Appendix I in *The Politics of Aesthetics-The Distribution of the Sensible*. I am drawing from the definitions of Aesthetics, Politics and Distribution of the Sensible given by Jacques Ranciere in this book as 'Glossary of Technical Terms'. Ranciere clarifies that, "aesthetics refers neither to art theory in general nor to the discipline that takes art as its object of study. Aesthetics is properly speaking a specific regime for identifying and thinking the arts – the aesthetic regime of art...aesthetics refers to the distribution of the sensible that determines a mode of articulation between forms of action, production, perception and thought."(p-82)

Politics (La Politique), according to Ranciere "only exists in intermittent acts of implementation that lack any overall principle or law...the essence of politics thus resides in acts of subjectivization that separate society from itself by challenging the 'natural order of bodies' in the name of equality and polemically reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible." (p-90)

Distribution of the Sensible is the production of systems of self-explanatory facts or givens. Thus it stands for both, "forms of inclusion and also exclusion." Then distribution of sensible in aesthetics has, ethical regime of images, representative regime of art and the aesthetical regime of art. Whereas in the political realm, Ranciere analyses police (as "a totalizing account of the population") and politics (which disturbs the police "by the subjectivization of those who have no part in it") (p-85)

⁷⁵ In his interview, K.K. Pandey talks about their first performance under the banner of DASTA – *Hum Na Sahenge Zor Kisika*. This play centres around three characters – one representing system, second symbolizing policeman and third personifying labourer. The issue at large depicts the complexities of labourer's daily life, their relation with land and freedom of expression, when they are threatened by policemen and politicians. When DASTA toured in nearby villages and townships with their other performances also, the situation was

“Neelabh and Pankaj had gone somewhere but soon they came back after what happened here...curfew was imposed particularly in the old city. Members of DASTA decided that we will do this and we did wherever possible, amidst curfew. Infact, throughout this period we continued to perform...”⁷⁶

Here above, one can be astounded by their ‘heroic’ action or commitment towards the ideology or the main concern to perform anyhow. But for a moment, keeping aside the sympathy aspect, what becomes intriguing is the question of whether as a political theatre group, were they exercising something that was completely new? Or their action of performing a play in a tumultuous post-riot environment legitimized their kind of theatre activism as more ‘radical’? Was political theatre expressing an uncharted area that could claim uniqueness? Even if a unique characteristic is there in every different group, how a performance like that of *Shahar Khamosh Nahi* would have generated a particularity of aesthetics that corresponded to a political situation?

To locate a pedagogical aspect in *Agit-Prop* theatre is one thing but to proclaim that as a *weapon* only to be subservient to left-oriented thinking is adamantly arrogance. Pankaj Srivastav reaffirms about a non-hierarchical functioning of DASTA stating,

“We were never governed by the party. Although when something happened, party leaders would have been taking decisions in their forum but it was never a case of instructing the group members... And we never carried those typical symbols like red flag and going around asking people to come and join the communist party, never. But yes when the party gave any candidate, we would go in the campaign team and we performed our plays...we always took it as a weapon but never polished it. Our thinking was restricted to see it as a cultural

very different when they performed *Shahar Khamosh Nahi*. According to K.K. Pandey, *Shahar Khamosh Nahi* was somewhat distinct as he adds that may be because of the curfew, the immediacy to perform wherever possible became the order of the day.

⁷⁶ Personal Interview with K.K. Pandey on 03/07/2012 near Katra, Allahabad

tool which would be directed towards the greater things of politics because we wanted to be politically correct.”⁷⁷

To go on and proclaim that whatever Mr. Srivastav has said reflects the entirety of DASTA is not the case; but rather to go through these statements and try to understand as to how their group was placing itself in topicality during those times. Concomitant to the topicality, the wider question of relation between theatre as an imagined vehicle of fulfilment vis-à-vis theatre as part of an ideological project, becomes one of the many paradigms which must be kept in focus. In contrast to this, building-on from this fore stated remark, what comes as surprise is that of a paradox – party’s non-interference on the one side and on the other side, ultimately trying to *fulfil* their purpose in accordance with *larger politics* which was directed by a conscious political choice to be politically correct. Without a contention, the members were ideologically left-leaning individuals but without a party’s directive, wasn’t their peripatetic endeavours congealed by *fulfilling their purpose*?

Agit-Prop and the Fusing of Art/Life

Being asked about the inception of DASTA and their modus operandi in the initial phase of its formative years, K.K. Pandey⁷⁸ responds with a surprising picture,

⁷⁷ Personal Interview with Pankaj Srivastav on 09/06/2013, at his residence near New Ashok Nagar, New Delhi

⁷⁸ As in the case of K.K. Pandey, he himself was a member of SAMANANTAR (proscenium based theatre group) and DASTA at the same time till the year 1988; when he left SAMANANTAR as its Secretary. He continues by explaining his experience in SAMANANTAR during 1981, “Samanantar as an organization mainly grew with their popular production of *Spartacus*. *Bhoma*, *Spartacus*, *Baaki Itihaas* all of these were done between ’80-’83 and yes *Juloos*. Their image was mainly established by *Spartacus*. Anil Ranjan Bhoumick was directing a lot of plays from SAMANANTAR and once when he had come to Allahabad he directed *Caucasian Chalk Circle* from the platform of DASTA in 1983. He would though maintain some sort of distance with being tagged as political theatre. Bhoumick for instance, took up the script of those productions whose form was Third Theatre... In ’83 there was a huge function that was called as *Sansparsh se Jeevant Pravah* in Hindi and *Towards the Interaction*

“from '77 to '79 university elections were not conducted. Emergency was lifted way back in '77 but union elections didn't take place for the next two years... during Emergency, only a handful of plays were happening and that too few of these were directly political. As such the landscape was not very encouraging also because of a steady decline in expectation within one-two years. Indeed a certain kind scepticism and disenchantment particularly politically, caught-up among the people...Radical organizations among the Left parties saw this as an appropriate juncture for intervention. Now before Dasta, Parivesh had already been formed in '76 and was active on the cultural front. It comprised mainly a group of students who were more inclined toward the literary side of it. They used to organize goshthiya (forums), seminars and would contest for the post of cultural secretary in different hostels. They convened a public meeting at Diamond Jubilee Hostel, in which they invited Alok Dhanwa and Kumar Vikal. These students once interrupted Agyey during one of his lectures asking so many questions that he had to literally run away. They were a brigade of afflictors who wouldn't rest without questioning”⁷⁹

in English. It was quite a big function as the event was organized simultaneously in three cities, Azamgarh, Lucknow and Allahabad. Participant teams were moving in a parallel manner from one place to other. From Lucknow it was the group of Prashant Bahuguna – Lakreez then SAMANANTAR Azamgarh, DASTA from Allahabad whereas other teams from outside U.P. included that of Badal da and Prabir Guha. DASTA was performing *Juloos*, SAMANANTAR was doing *Bhoma*, Lakreez did *Tuglaq*. Badal da or Prabir da was doing *Michil* or *Pagla Ghoda*; among them one did *Michil* and the other did *Pagla Ghoda*.”

As indicated in the above mentioned interview, a strong sense of political theatre existed – in the case of SAMANANTAR, primarily at the level of proscenium theatre. Though being distancing itself with the idea of tagging itself as political theatre, it nonetheless was restructuring the form of Third Theatre in a different sort of staging. Moreover, if a common set of individuals were directing *Bhoma*, *Spartacus*, *Juloos* for one theatre group (SAMANANTAR) and then *Caucasian Chalk Circle* for another (DASTA), then it becomes somewhat ironical that how does one distinguish between a political and non-political theatre? At hand there are two kind of minimalism working with each other – one which is approached through the texts of Third Theatre (SAMANANTAR) and the other via art as life (DASTA). Herein, I intend to draw attention toward a not so complex question – to say that whatever was done by SAMANANTAR can come under the larger framework of political theatre would be a misguided follow-up or even the opposite assumption that DASTA's political nature was getting diluted because some of the productions were directed by a group member of SAMANANTAR could be detrimental. I must spell out clearly that SAMANANTAR's body of work is not on the table for discussion. Given the scope of this dissertation, I have tried to bring in this parallel context for not neglecting its historical significance. It will take another project to analyse the plays done under the banner of SAMANANTAR.

⁷⁹ Personal Interview with K.K. Pandey on 03/07/2012 near Katra, Allahabad

At this crossroad of post-Emergency period and Janata Party government in office, cultural organizations in Allahabad like PARIVESH, DASTA and numerous others were operating; some under direct guidance of a party structure and some on a voluntary motivation. Specially, in the case of PARIVESH it was a group of students which drew inspiration from a left leaning ideology but conspicuously didn't carry the symbols of a left organization. As mentioned in the above text of the interview, PARIVESH came into existence during the period of Emergency, organizing forum and platform for talks. Even though limited to a bounded sphere of activity, the mere response in the middle of Emergency was an action in necessity for further deliberations and scope in the arena of political theatre.

In other interviews, like that with Mukhtar Ahmad, Kaushal Kishore, Zia-ul Haq all of them concede atleast one common angle – that there were only a handful of plays which were political and the general situation was not very favourable for theatre as such. If then, for quite a good duration of time, i.e. from '75 to '79 Student Union elections didn't take place, it is more than a coincidence that in the same period political theatre also suffered from a certain sort of *futility disorder*. If *Afeem ke Phool*, *Vande Mataram* and certainly other plays which have been dealt here, comes under the count of few exceptions, it is more likely to fall under a generalized version of reasoning that the political action got exhausted and was finished. There is no doubt about a gradual decline in political theatre during the fore mentioned period but to glorify these as a distant historical moment in the past and pose an idyllic explanation for a progression in chain-command would be a superfluous reading.

Interestingly, the approximate timeline of JANAM's tour in '78-'79, matches with that of Dasta's first production – *Hum na Sahenge Zor Kisika*⁸⁰. Hence the time gap between

⁸⁰ The narrative of the play centres around three characters; one representing the system, the second personifies the police and the third one as labourer. It deals with the larger questions of laborers, land issue and freedom of expression. The text of the play still remains untraceable. See Personal Interview with K.K. Pandey on 03 July, 2012.

JANAM and DASTA doesn't fit into the framework of that between IPTA and JANAM. Even so, there is no official record of an Allahabad unit of JANAM but there was some kind of consorted effort which was put in to oversee such an experiment which ultimately didn't materialize⁸¹. Then to say that once JANAM's tour was over and the momentum had died down completely, only then DASTA could take the charge would be utterly erroneous. In addition to this, few members of DASTA were also part of other existing theatre groups.

What is at stake here is the situation of a void on the *Agit-Prop* front of an organized cultural-unit, with a condition of an enlarged spectrum in *political theatre*. Saying this, my point of assertion is directed towards the relationship of these constituent forces, trying to fulfil those *missed possibilities* which couldn't be realized earlier in the domain of a strict parameter for political theatre. Whether it is the move from IPTA to post '79 experiment of JANAM Allahabad or the shift in vocabulary from JANAM Allahabad to DASTA, a certain sort of potential gave the push for another exploration; where the shift from JANAM to DASTA is not only on an ideological plane (since both of them represents two different Communist parties) but also in terms of an extension in understanding *value*, aesthetics of theatre performances.

Talking to an erstwhile member of DASTA – Pankaj Srivastav, flamboyantly expresses about his own experience after watching *Itihaas Gawah Hai* in 1984,

“That play just struck me, and it worked like a hammer. Till then, I personally had not seen any theatre in street form and this thing was in itself miraculous. Usually the conception regarding theatre was only limited to proscenium space whereas this thing was simply too effective...in the follow-up of these street performances there were study circles in which I came across *Bhagat Singh's*

⁸¹ While interviewing Ajeet Bahadur, one of the founder members of JANAM Allahabad Unit in 1989 hinted toward an earlier attempt about the formation of a local unit about ten years prior to his arrival on the cultural front of JANAM. Though not certain about its actual formation in reality, Students' Federation of India (SFI), Allahabad Unit had invited JANAM to perform.

Why I'm an Atheist?... I took the membership of PSO on 30th October, 1984 and this I remember because the next day Indira Gandhi was assassinated... when I started participating in street theatre, I would play Dhapli and to some extent I had a sense of tune in comparison to others like K.K; even thought about learning music at Prayag Sangeet Samiti but then backed out thinking that these are bourgeois tendencies because songs, theatres, arts are there to change the nation and society... So, wherever meetings were convened we would go on the dais and sing two or three songs. We became confident that we can gather four to five hundred people anytime...⁸²

On one hand what seems to be an energetic, dynamic and erudite thrust of such a form of theatre. On the other hand, questions regarding an understanding and learning about its aesthetic elements being termed as bourgeois propels a set of contradiction. Adjuvant to these inhibitions about different constituents in an art form like street theatre, the discourse on *value* in relation with an earlier comment by Moloysree Hashmi as the very core of *Agit-Prop* theatre does throw up an enquiry in locating the problematic of *missed possibilities*. As stated in the previous chapter, Moloysree Hashmi categorically mentions that everything cannot be *Agit-Prop*. According to her, it has nothing to do with the quality of a performance; instead street theatre has the responsibility of dealing with issues.

To see through this line of thought, the affective angle of different art forms, as in case of Pankaj Srivastav's experiencing the production of *Itihaas Gawaah Hai* undoubtedly puts this kind of prioritization (issues over quality) in a fix. But this also doesn't necessarily mean that the prioritization has to be done from the other way around. In academic debates the dichotomy of aesthetics and politics have been in the discourse for quite a long time now; where one strand has envisaged arts as something that can overcome itself and become life whereas the other extreme has left the political aspect stranded in lieu of something greater,

⁸² Personal Interview with Pankaj Srivastav on 09/06/2013, at his residence near New Ashok Nagar, New Delhi

which ultimately separate itself from life⁸³ (Ranciere, 2006: 6). Engaging with such a standpoint, Pankaj Srivastav addresses an imperative point,

“no doubt, we were cultural activist but politics was always in our mind. We didn’t think much about other plays and compare with our own street plays to analyse because it was not a primary concern for us...plays were done according to the necessity; if there was a riot in the city then there were discussions among the party members and obviously at other forums also. So, our actions in the form of street play couldn’t be seen in isolation. What I mean to say is that we didn’t use to think about how the play was going to be performed. At the same time we were doing wall writing, pamphlet distribution, and other activities and would then also perform these plays. Our group was not a typical theatre group like others who had to rehearse or practice whereas being cut off from remaining things. An activity on student front was at the same level as that of the cultural group. You can imagine that I contested in union elections, gradually becoming the main speaker of the organization...It was perhaps beyond our conception that we were doing a part for theatre group rather we placed ourselves as activists who also did theatre.”⁸⁴

Given the amplitude of *cultural activities*, ranging from student front meetings to performing street plays as an intrinsic exercise within the same ambit, it follows the same logic of

⁸³ In an essay titled *From Aesthetics to Politics?*, Ranciere opens up his primary concern saying, “throughout my historical and political research was to point out the aesthetic dimension of the political experience.” He goes on explaining that *aesthetics* shares a sensibility of time and space but clarifying that time and space ought not to be seen as forms of *presentation of the objects of knowledge*, instead as forms of *configuration/distribution/assignation* of the common and private place. In the case of politics he proposes that, “politics itself is not the exercise of power or struggle for power. Politics is first of all the configuration of a space as political, the framing of a specific sphere of experience, the setting of objects posed as ‘common’...Politics first is the conflict about the very existence of that sphere of experience, the realities of those common objects and the capacity of those subjects” See, *The Politics of Aesthetics/ The Aesthetics of Politics*. Thus for him art is political, not because the manner in which it *represents social structures, conflicts or identities* but by “its own practice, shapes forms of visibility that reframe the way in which practices, manners of being and modes of feeling and saying are interwoven in a commonsense, which means a ‘sense of the common’ embodied in a common sensorium.” In some sense, what Ranciere is trying to say is that there is a kind of inseparability between politics and arts since these two are-not *permanent realities*. “Each of them is a conditional reality, that exists or not according to a specific partition of the sensible.” Hence in this context according to Ranciere, political art must strive to showcase the *collage* of both the opposing politics, one in which “art suppresses itself in order to become life and second where “art does politics on the condition of doing no politics at all”.

⁸⁴ Personal Interview with Pankaj Srivastav on 09/06/2013, at his residence near New Ashok Nagar, New Delhi

inseparability between art and life. Wherein, indistinction leads to a political *arrear* – people gathering mechanism before public meetings (that too a functional approach of simply contending with it being done) and justifying the prejudice of arts as a bourgeois, decadent offspring which has to necessarily come under an overarching indemnity of politics. Closely interlinked to such an understanding would be the development of the strategy of minimalism and its aesthetic rodomontade in the arena of political theatre. Professor Sanjay Saxena strictly gets across this point,

“As far as the fallouts went, most people compared shabby theatrical performances with the big budget Bollywood style of productions; sympathized with theatre persons and pitied their miserable resources which made performances much worse than what they would normally be...the absence of funds and resources led to the growth of an aesthetics of minimalism in which those who were behind those productions were happy to belittle the importance of stage sets, make-up, costume and even lights and sounds... They employed language which was often on the border of being uncivil, the sword that would never be used in polite drawing room conversation of Allahabad.”⁸⁵

With quite non-penitence, what the above quoted interview reflects is the bragging of an apostasy – a total desertion from a cause, where minimal aesthetics in itself serves the inadequacy of such a definition of politics in political theatre. So to put it simply, the normative stance regarding minimalism couldn't see beyond an *aestheticized format* in political theatre which in turn would distanciate itself from the very aesthetics that came out

⁸⁵ Personal Interview with Prof. Sanjay Saxena on 04/12/2012, at his residence near Ashok Nagar in Allahabad; The interview is in a text format which I wrote as he spoke since he was not comfortable with any kind of recording.

of the practice of politics. This exposition can be sensed when Pankaj Srivastav comments on political theatre's default characteristics,

“street theatre is a guerrilla form which came out from a historical necessity...people would come, gather somewhere, did their thing and just disappeared. So, there was this establishment which was constantly trying to track down. I have done theatre for 17 years, no forgive me, I did for 13 years but I have never been hunted by anybody. Now people's mindset is stuck that somebody or the other is after them. In this kind of condition the question of aesthetics becomes important, right! In a war like situation, when you do theatre there it has a completely different meaning...but in a situation where nobody is going after you, no one is interrupting your play and you are still in that same mudra, I believe it is an utter stupidity.”⁸⁶

(Im)Possibility of Fulfilment in Political Theatre

“Where was I? Yes, if I would have learned music in a serious manner, then it could have been possible to generate an economic source out of it. If we would have developed the nuances of acting skills then later in our life we could have channelized it into a medium for our living and we may have sustained this. What we didn't realize was atleast a certain level of discipline about our art and today I regret this; because in the Hindi belt there was a possibility of choir, people could have formed a repertory. This much potential we had but we mistook and saw it only as a political weapon which was our lacuna...we should have brushed this strong aspect because you see, if we don't sing in rhythm nobody will listen to what so ever good things we

⁸⁶ Personal Interview with Pankaj Srivastav on 09/06/2013, at his residence near New Ashok Nagar, New Delhi

sing...we missed this opportunity and our leadership in which I was also a part, couldn't judge this. Ultimately if your rhythm is weak then your politics will also get feeble because you are doing a political thing..."⁸⁷

To push this in a critical perspective, DASTA as a group was claiming to be not governed by its parent party but the plays, performances in *mohallas* and *bastees* as song recitals culminating into mass gatherings and public meetings, entailed the logic of an inculcated schooling of seeing these as *political weapons*. Which in turn would be seen as sacrosanct to maintain and uphold the political correctness of an unabridged edition of politics? Notably, in the above mentioned interview text, one may argue about the disjunction between arts and politics where the preference of one over another caved in a space for tutelage functioning. But more than so, what is at stake here is the aesthetico-politico conditioning whose derivative needs to be seen as was constituted by the *missed possibilities* of unfulfilled realizations of an epoch gone.

At this conjunction, I will do a mapping of missed possibilities and its genealogical terrain will be based on Walter Benjamin's *Theses 'On the Concept of History'*⁸⁸ wherein the basic endeavour will be to try and extract a political impulse from this work. In doing so, I will initially take up the essence of *Theses* one by one and explicate my stance of criticality at it as a point of departure. As the name in itself suggests, Benjamin's primary deliberation revolves around a critique against a linear progression of history. A concern that doesn't merge into one entity, instead questions the ways of historical processes which unfolds even in the making of historiography, in relation with historical materialism. The very first Thesis opens

⁸⁷ Personal Interview with Pankaj Srivastav on 09/06/2013, at his residence near New Ashok Nagar, New Delhi

⁸⁸ The particular title has been printed & published as *Theses 'On the Concept of History'* in the works of Hannah Arendt, Michael Lowy, Alfredo Lucero-Montano to name a few; In the book *Illuminations*, translated by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich the title appears as *Theses On the Philosophy of History*.

with the much quoted familiar image of the automaton, for thinking through historical materialism. While scholars have analysed this image in varied ways, here I wish to interrogate the notion of ‘winning’ articulated by Benjamin and the relation between historical materialism and theology that is at its heart,

There was once, we know, an automaton constructed in such a way that it could respond to every move by a chess player with a countermove that would ensure the winning of the game. A puppet wearing Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent on all sides. Actually, a hunchbacked dwarf – a master at chess – sat inside and guided the puppet’s hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophic counterpart to this apparatus. The puppet, called “historical materialism,” is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is small and ugly and has to keep out of sight.

(Benjamin, 2003; 389)

Though, Thesis I remain one of the most debateable propositions and continues to be interpreted in different ways till date, the metaphorical analogy which it draws, nevertheless points at an invariable conjugality between “historical materialism” and theology, with a waiver of ‘if’. In some sense the puppet has a choice of either continuously winning against any viable opponent, where the inevitability of winning comes from the logic of an automatic function of accomplishment. In spite of the reliance and service of theology, what this automaton does manage to show is that of some kind of mutual dependence of each other in order for the automaton to work. Benjamin holds that this allegory of theological dwarf has to be kept in secret because that is crude or atleast non-presentable at the face value. So, it is to be used but not shown. An immediate question that comes to the fore is what does theology offer in terms of its service to “historical materialism”? If theology is at the heart of this automaton and its primary modality is to serve the other, the automaton as an inevitable

winner does not care who is at whose service. Since it is pre-destined to overcome any given opponent, even a role reversal (historical materialism in the service of theology) cannot be ruled out. In a subtle sense, Pankaj Srivastav's remark about the ongoing methods of institutionalization of the street art form indicates a similar kind of volte-face,

“Government organizations understood the inherent quality of street theatre. Starting from family planning, etc. and what not...you can say, an art form which grew against the establishment, against status quo, the government used it very beautifully. Actors started getting money, so the art form stayed on but its intrinsic characteristic of anti-establishment, died down. May be one can say that, every weapon that you create is not decided by those who creates it.”⁸⁹

Here above, there are three strange strands which are constantly trying to oppose each other. In the first case, there is a kind of a disavowal reaction of making a weapon at all, only because of the pre-narrated experience that it could be subsumed by an *establishment*. What this line of thought initiates is a kind of regressive understanding of non-fulfilment because it rests on a putative reason of failure. Secondly, if the automaton in Benjamin becomes a weapon for only winning against the opponents, it will lead to a domination of theology over “historical materialism”. So the automaton can only be seen as an experiment rather than a prescribed format of scheduling *winnability*. Third, even if the *establishment* incorporates these weapons, it itself completes an ordeal of fulfilling the function of these weapons only to rescind in search of new weapon. Thus a possibility of creating a new weapon will be there from the constituting element of that, which was *missed* in the earlier one.

In extension, Thesis II is one of the central imperative propositions where Benjamin accentuates his take on redemption, past-present-future and the concept of history while at the

⁸⁹ Personal Interview with Pankaj Srivastav on 09/06/2013, at his residence near New Ashok Nagar, New Delhi

same time debunking the progression of historicism. His indulgence about the continuity in history as an illusion offers an enswathing idea of political messianism,

There is happiness – such as could arouse envy in us – only in the air we have breathed, among people we could have talked to, women who could have given themselves to us. In other words, the idea of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the idea of redemption. The same applies to the idea of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption. Doesn't a breath of the air that invaded earlier days caress us as well? In the voices we hear, isn't there echo of now silent ones? Don't the women we court have sisters they no longer recognize? If so, then there is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Then our coming was expected on earth. Then like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* messianic power, a power on which the past has a claim. (Benjamin, 2003; 389-390)

Thus, it is neither some kind of a *dolum* (Latin – trick-play), in which a social issue is performed and 'public knowledge' is channelized through its 'enactment' of the act. Nor it is a stance, where theatre at the basic premise is not considered as a space credible enough to create serious intervention in political sphere. Also understanding that such a vocabulary could somewhat imply, a sense of the past with all its *nostalgic effervescence* but the task here is exactly to logically see the radical possibility in such a *nosto-redemptive* rupture in the present. Centring on the discourse of redemption and *weak* messianic power, I argue that past-present dichotomy and its futuristic culmination in redemption cannot hinge on a distant realization, instead derives its potential from the *not so past and not yet future* missed possibilities; opening up an immense portion for *now time*, but which cannot be a barometer

keeping a tab of what is fulfilled and what is not. Also a *nosto-redemptive*⁹⁰ equation can only become a tool without falling prey to the schematic way of messianic power because the now time is filled with continuous radical impulse which is happening at every moment – contracting to such an extent that an indispensable division creates simultaneous events.

Redemption for Benjamin is messianic, where things need to be amended in relation with past generation. In *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History'*, Michael Lowy writes, “according to extracts from *Mikrokosmos*⁹¹ cited by Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*, there is no progress if the souls that have suffered are not entitled to happiness and fulfilment/completion”(Lowy 2005; 30). But to forgo a conclusion, that a non-closure of past generation has its natural outcome in the form of further fulfilment would not only be pre-emptive but also follow a danger of giving away, like an approach of lackadaisical lottery making.

So, rather than shelving the redemption as a complete whole, what must be kept in mind is a critical assessment of any proclaimed fulfilment or even non-fulfilment that considers the teleological progression of history as *the* only parameter. Then, redemption will no longer be messianic, instead will subjugate any other chance, only to conform and contain the constituents of salvation; though never possessing over the susceptibility of elements struggling against any kind of conformation. Thus the revolutionary potential cannot be only brooding, but needs to be performed in the *now time*, which doesn't necessarily be known or acknowledged as redemptive.

⁹⁰ Nosto-Redemptive will stand for nostalgia and redemption. What I mean by *nosto-redemptive* is that a conflation of these two should not be seen as one completing the other or as an unified goal. Nosto-Redemptive equation is then to equip the spirit of struggle without fixating itself into its own schema of either's fulfilment.

⁹¹ *Mikrokosmos* was written by Hermann Lotze, a German philosopher whose above specified work dealt with ethical and religious philosophy of history which according to Michael Lowy attracted attention in the late 1930's. For further reference see, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History'*; p- 32

Benjamin's Thesis VIII which deals with the forthcoming face of Fascism during that period in Germany as a "natural progression of history" tells a lot more than a mere coincidence with that of a brewing Hindu Right wing communal force during 1980's, prior to 1992 Babri Masjid Demolition. Thesis VIII reads,

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that accord with this insight. Then we will clearly see that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against fascism. One reason fascism has a chance is that, in the name of progress, its opponents treat it as a historical norm. The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are "still" possible in the twentieth century is not philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge – unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.

(Benjamin, 1940: 392)

What becomes exigent through this thesis is to extract a straight forward inference regarding the *now time*. One, in which the call is for a "real state of emergency" and the other, chews over some kind of naturalization in the wake of Fascism; as if taking it as a phenomenon which was bound to happen. And interestingly the acceptance is already preceded by that myopic vision of history where knowledge's credence serves the norm, "still" happening in *now time*. Hence *now time* has both the probabilities – "real state of emergency" and *exception/rule* in the form of Fascism. It's not definitive about what could get *realized* but is a pure contingency where missed possibilities are always immanent in this *now time*. From the perspective of a possibility of "real state of emergency" in *now time*, transgressions has then a coessential relation with these *missed possibilities*.

Earlier transgressions were not derided, on the contrary served as a potential of *missed possibilities*, quite similar to that of a trampoline. These missed possibilities will come back time and again in order to incite further transgressions. Thus a paradox of transgression and missed can be seen as two constitutive fraction which are antithetical to each other. Dialectic of transgression and that which was *missed*, would give rise to production of new meanings and open up corollary theatre practices in the following years.

In an earlier reference to Emergency which has been discussed at length, within the context of *Afeem ke Phool* – Dadu and Peelu’s proviso with respect to a situation like Emergency as two drug addicts do not hinge on their “illegal” consumption of opium. Inimical to their decision as such, still why will they not remain immune from a situation like Emergency? Is it only that they are those whose conditions cannot be more deplorable than their present state? They will still be ill-treated at the whims of the State because the rule of Emergency needs them as exception. Dadu and Peelu’s *now time* happens in the act of transgression when they push-off the MLA from podium. Their action must not be seen in a classical act of fit of rage, where violence is decried on the pretext of being simply seen as a normative reaction. Instead it’s the transgression in *now time* that an outburst in such a tangible form can gust out their always/already submissive subject into a transformation in reality.

While on one hand IPTA’s performance of *Afeem ke Phool* is taking place during Emergency, JANAM’s *transgressive aesthetics* can be located within machine’s *body* in the text of *Machine* and the moment of strike in *Aurat*. My reading of *Machine* through the critical tool of *becoming* is trying to put forward a different set of *transgressive aesthetics* constituted by that which was *missed* in the earlier transgressions of IPTA. The uncanny figure of robot and its subsequent tiers of differentiation with *basic body* open up multifarious *bodies*. These alienating bodies are unique from that act of transgression offered by Daadu and Peelu on stage. Even in the case of *Vande Mataram*, hanging bodies are *spatial practice* in overlapping

lived and conceived space of Emergency. I have looked at *transgressive aesthetics* through these *spatial practices* precisely because the connotation of hanging bodies has references to pre-independence period but also has a representative structure of body as a fixated body in transience.

This statement may seem to suggest a linear progression of *transgression/missed* or *missed/transgression* i.e. the movement from IPTA to JANAM or even to DASTA. But that is not the point; IPTA JANAM and DASTA are being taken as three different groups only as a limited case study. In the third case, DASTA's formation under P.S.O and the argument of alliance of bodies corroborates the ideological thrust behind I.P.F's launch. Referring this point back to the text of, *Formation of IPF: A New Leap in Political Assertion* it mentions in a clear way that the broadening of a mass based approach was undertaken, which also tried to address those issues that were being lead by *non-party mass movements*. Participating in elections was more a sort of a tactical position, though maintaining the priority of peasant struggle over parliamentary politics. In another document quoted earlier, "Review of National Situation and Party Policy" – *Central Committee's Message to the IPF Rally held on 8 October 1990*, analyses the role of IPF as the struggle for a radical experimentation within democracy; its domain being not only limited to the fixed contours of Left movement as such but issues concerning environment or minorities even reforms in civil society. Then *alliance of bodies* focuses on an approach of a wider, mass appeal that can be seen in DASTA's way of activating politics among public spaces – issues of communalism, secularism and popular front was infused in spaces other than factories, mills and industrial landscape.

At this hour of our present being, we face a serious danger – Hindutva sugar coated with 'development'.

Vested interests are ensuring that this time the *India Shining* drubbing is not repeated again; only to further legitimize their bar of stakes in 'truthfully representing' the 'public opinion'.

There is a kind of an uncanny similarity between 1991 and 2014 – 'economic crisis', ushering in neo-liberal policies with more 'rationality', Advani's Rath Yatra, Babri Masjid demolition. Communal riots have been orchestrated in the last few months in Uttar Pradesh.

In the context of the region, it hasn't been long ago that Uttar Pradesh had a chief minister in Rajnath Singh.

'Development' of youth via 'skill management' is being harped upon time and again, over critical research and higher education.

But we must not give away ourselves to the conformism of 'professionalism' in academics, where academics will be writing an elegy of education.

CONCLUSION

History as we see it today has been captured into a time bound perfection of incorrigible structure, which also carries the very *palimpsest potency* of our own past. Herein lies the paradox; not an imaginative dualism by the essence of its puzzling meaning, rather the riveting idea of a non-continuum time. What I have tried to locate or investigate in this dissertation, concerning the area of political theatre is the *missed possibilities* within this continuum style of completeness in its entirety. This has also entailed to problematize the complexity of political theatre performances during the period of Emergency i.e. 1975-1977, where the archive to an extent, is currently at a very nascent stage. Such an attempt can also certainly, conjure up the vigorous language of political theatre during this period, concomitant to the socio-political realm.

But what becomes interesting is the logic of a *reservoir* of this *missed* which according to my understanding is never a contained periphery as the *reservoir* can also be *missed*. Since this *missed* in its very bare minimum has that latency of a *possibility*, which can be fulfilled and at the same time remain unfulfilled.

As a theoretical framework, I have considered first and foremost the concept of non-linear historical time where Walter Benjamin lays down the criticism against this complete nature of history and its function towards *hermetic brevity*. In starting-off the first chapter I have taken up the writings of Dr. Satyabrata Sinha, precisely to foreground the bigger picture of theatre practice in Allahabad. Though not “political theatre”, by the definitions that I have dealt with in other sections, Dr. Sinha’s position and understanding of *new theatre* vis-a-vis *experimental theatre*, and vice-versa in the wake of Emergency; his critique of RSS ideology and Hindu Nationalism professed in *shakhas*, gives an inside-out framework to grapple with

the issue of communalism especially, in the context of region. The two texts that I have discussed are *Waiting for Godot* and *Andher Nagri*, both being completely at disparity – in terms of their own historical formulations. I have juxtaposed Ian Macdonald's work on the politics of physical culture with basic texts of RSS's ideologue – M.S. Golwalker to see through the performance of *Waiting for Godot*, directed by Dr. Sinha; also exposing the idea of *apotheosis* in the doctrines of Golwalkar's thoughts. Emergency has undoubtedly become a connecting thematic concern, as it has not only helped me to put the historical background in precision, but also the juridico-political framework. With the exposition of the play *Afeem ke Phool*, these questions of *excesses* has been brought at the forefront through the characters of Daadu and Peelu.

In another text, performed under the banner of IPTA, *Vande Mataram* traces the loci of *transgression* in *spatial practices* as it has argued with respect to the onstage representation of two hanging bodies. Henri Lefebvre's *spatial triad* supports this reading of the play and particularly to those two figures of hanging bodies. The reference of hanging bodies becomes imperative more so ever, because of a situation like Emergency and the space that it unfolds. Then *spatial practices* cannot be read as that indiscernible constituent whose purpose is to fulfil the *conceived space* nor the *lived space*, instead that which creates a *transgressive* moment in the act, in the performance of doing. Performances during the period of Emergency highlight these *transgressions* – which creates a vector of new meaning and understanding through acting within the limits but stretching the boundaries of the *order* of things.

With respect to the stretching of boundaries of the order of things, I have argued that representation in *Agit-Prop* performance doesn't necessarily follow the logic of identification. As a case in point, the production of *Machine* presents a certain kind of mundaneness of human body. With the help of the idea of *becoming*, *Machine* quashes down the

representative body centered thinking into a creation of a fluid identity of body. Taking a cue from Moloysree Hashmi's comment on the value of *Agit-Prop* theatre, I have tried to bring in the moment of *strike* in *Aurat*; interrogating a *value of strike*.

In my last chapter, I have started-off with two photographs, in which the members of DASTA are seen performing a song – *Sangam ki Dharti Par*. With the help of interviews and other related literatures around, right-wing communal riots; references to popular fronts and their politics has guided me to traverse through the impossibility of fulfilment in political theatre. I have argued that even this fulfilment has the possibility of a possible; the possible can only be derived from this *missed* as the *missed* is the constitutive element for this *possibility*. In this context this research has tried to traverse only through three of the political theatre groups in Uttar Pradesh roughly around the period, 1975-1985. Taking into account of the mainstream cultural groups and also at the same time construe the imperativeness of fringe cultural organizations, I have argued that the heterogeneous idiom of political theatre always carried an impervious thrust for a militant exigency; not under compulsion but that of the radical *possibility* which was entrenched at each immanent situation.

There are a few other concerns which in my opinion have tried to focus through the scope of this research – also indicating philosophical contemplation regarding the idea of *reservoir* of the *missed* situations within the discourse of political theatre. What I have been trying to address, are the juncture of events in these political theatre performances, which were missed but nonetheless carried a *non-idyll allegorization*, culminating into a further deferral of potentiality. There can be two ways of addressing the situation: one that it started and came to an end, second toward their decline at each interval, those vanishing points carried a latency which later on tried to abruptly intervene in the continuum progression through the activation and effacement of a deferred existence of more and more fringe cultural groups. At this instance, there are some clarifications to be made. Firstly, the years of activity of these

groups – IPTA, JANAM, and DASTA are without in any contention, placed one after the other. So, it may appear that I am myself buying the logic of continuity, when I say deferred existence of more fringe cultural organizations. On the contrary, I would assert that the activization and effacement can be articulated more in terms of *transgression* and *missed possibilities*. Here the idea of missed possibilities implies, not a nature of possibility which is missed or that which cannot be realized, because such an attempt is absurd. Rather, the missed has to be seen in relation to a possible unfolding of history, from a constitutive point of view. In other words, the temporal disjunction introduced by this term missed possibilities, does in no way close or limit the nature of such a possibility, but instead constitutes a relation of a possible future with a given past. Here the closure of history is immanent with an infinite number of possible outcomes, which makes that history susceptible to change. To that extent, missed is not a qualificatory marker of possibility, which in itself is impossible because possibility per se falls under the ‘what’ of reality. Then possibility always follows a modal function in context to its ontological validity. The idea of missed is, ontologically speaking also a modal expression. Hence, missed possibilities try to discover a relationship between these two different modalities of history. Such a relationship also points toward other forms of relations like that between necessity and contingency, between normalcy and exception, between absence and presence. The latter is a theme which this research has also tried to explore. To that extent I have attempted to invent the logic of spectral presence of a constellation or a reservoir of contingent moments, which secretly distributes and dissimulates through normal and necessary progression of history. Like a ghost, whose presence is never fixed here or there but which can pass through every spatial determination simultaneously. This constellation is not a fixed moment of history, but rather is a proximate presence which informs every moment and yet is absent from every other. This is the paradox of a reservoir which is a constellation, because a reservoir seeks to capture or store. Whereas

in this case what it does is always escape, capture. It is as insistent as a ghost who is condemned to repeat herself/himself till the end of time but only in this case such a condemnation is also, its unnamed redemption. The phantom of transgression lurks behind every defined moment of failure, with its tensed muscles, always ready to take that leap which would devour such a failure and make itself radiant with the brilliant colors of all possible futures. It is this dis-embodied figure, shimmering under some distant sun, which always escapes the darkness of our past, which makes our present livable. To that extent this work has been an attempt, not to search for redemption but to think of a life in which every act of redemption seems unredeemable.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books and Articles

- Agamben, Giorgio. *State of Exception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Alter, Joseph S. *The Wrestler's Body: Identity and Ideology in North India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Anand, Anupam. *Hindi Rang-karm Ke Amrit Putra: Dr Satyabrata Sinha*. 1st Edition. Allahabad: Hindustani Academy Press, 2009.
- Basu, Sajal. *Underground Literature During Indian Emergency*. Calcutta: Minerva, 1978.
- Basu, Tapan, Sumit Sarkar, Tanika Sarkar, Pradip Datta, and Sambuddha Sen. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993.
- Beckett, Samuel. *Proust*. New York: Grove Press, 1957.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Translated by Hannah Arendt and Harry Zohn. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968.
- . *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. Edited by E. F. N Jephcott and Peter Demetz. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.
- . *The Arcades Project*. Edited by Kevin MacLaughlin, Rolf Tiedemann, and Howard Eiland. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Belknap Press, 1999.
- . *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Vol. 4, 1938-1940*. Edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W Jennings. Translated by Edmond Jephcott et al. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theatre; The Development of an Aesthetic*. Translated and edited by John Willett. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964.
- . *Collected Plays*. Edited by Ralph Manheim and John Willett. New York: Vintage Books, 1971.
- Bright, Jagat S. *Allahabad High Court to Shah Commission*. New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1979.
- Carr, G.A. "The Synchronization of Sport and Physical Education Under National Socialism." *Human Kinetics Journals* (1979).
- Das, Sandip, ed. *Jayaprakash Narayan: A Centenary Volume*. Mittal Publications, 2005.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and et al. *What Is Philosophy?* New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. London: Continuum, 1988.
- Dutt, Utpal. *Towards a Revolutionary Theatre*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2009.
- Erven, Eugene Van. *The Playful Revolution: Theatre & Liberation in Asia*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. 3rd ed. Vintage, 2001.
- Federici, Silvia. "Precarious Labor: A Feminist Viewpoint." presented at the This is Forever: From Inquiry to Refusal Discussion Series, Bluestockings Radical Bookstore, New York City, October 28, 2006.
- Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre*. London; New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Forsyth, Alison, and Christopher Megson. *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Foucault, Michel. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Edited by Donald F Bouchard. Translated by Sherry Simon & Donald F Bouchard. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- . "Preface to Transgression." In *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, edited by Donald F Bouchard, translated by Sherry Simon & Donald F Bouchard. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- Gandhi, D.V., and Krishna Kant. *Era of Discipline*. New Delhi: Samachar Bharati, 1976.
- Ghosh, Arjun. *A History of the Jana Natya Manch: Plays for the People*. New Delhi; Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2012.
- Ghosh, Arjun, and Sudhanva Deshpande. *Theatre of the Streets: The Jana Natya Manch Experience*. New Delhi: JANAM, 2007.
- Golwalkar, Madhav Sadashiv. *Bunch of Thoughts*. 3rd ed. Bangalore: Vikrama Prakashan; Rashtrarthana Sahitya, 1966.
- . *We or Our Nationhood Defined*. Nagpur: Bharat Prakashan], 1945.
- Government of India. *White Paper on Misuse of Mass Media During the Internal Emergency*. [New Delhi]: [Government of India Press], 1977.
- Government of India (Republic). *The Constitution of India*. Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1949.
- Government of India, and Shah Commission of Inquiry. *Shah Commission of Inquiry: Report Volumes 1-3*. New Delhi, 1978.
- Grotowski, Jerzy. *Towards a Poor Theatre*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970.

- Hamacher, Werner. *Affirmative, Strike: Benjamin's "Critique of Violence."* Translated by Dana Hollander, 1994.
- Hardgrave, Robert L. "The Congress in India-Crisis and Split." *Asian Survey* 10, no. 3 (March 1, 1970): 256–262. doi:10.2307/2642578.
- Harishchandra, Bhartendu. *Andher Nagri Chaupatt Raja*. Delhi: Manu, 1995.
- "Institutions Destroyed During Emergency: Must Be Revived: Kuldip Nayar." *Firstpost*. Accessed July 19, 2013. <http://www.firstpost.com/fwire/institutions-destroyed-during-emergency-must-be-revived-kuldip-nayar-914799.html>.
- Jai, Janak Raj. *Emergency Excesses: A Daylight Robbery of Human Rights and JP - The Saviour*. Daya Books, 1996.
- Jameson, Fredric, ed. *Aesthetics and Politics*. London; New York: Verso, 2007.
- Kirby, Michael. "On Political Theatre." *The Drama Review: TDR* 19, no. 2 (June 1, 1975): 129–135. doi:10.2307/1144954.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Oxford, UK; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1991.
- "Left Opportunism in Service of Counter-Revolution." *New Age*. n.d., Vol. XXIII No. 33 edition. P.C. Joshi Archive. Accessed July 19, 2012.
- Löwy, Michael. *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's On the Concept of History*. Translated by Chris Turner. London; New York: Verso, 2005.
- Luxemburg, Rosa. *Reform or Revolution and Other Writings*. Edited by Helen Scott. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2006.
- McDonald, Ian. "'PHYSIOLOGICAL PATRIOTS'? The Politics of Physical Culture and Hindu Nationalism in India." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 34, no. 4 (December 1, 1999): 343–358.
- McDonald, Ronan. *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Meijer, Irene Costera, and Baukje Prins. "How Bodies Come to Matter: An Interview with Judith Butler." *Signs* 23, no. 2 (Winter, 1998) (1998): 275–286.
- Merrifield, Andy. "Henri Lefebvre: A Socialist in Space." In *Thinking Space*, edited by N. J. Thrift and Mike Crang. London; New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Ministry of Home Affairs (India). *Why Emergency?* [New Delhi]: Govt. of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, 1975.
- "National Emergency and Our Party's Task." *New Age*. n.d., Vol. XXIII No. 27 edition. P.C. Joshi Archive. Accessed July 19, 2012.

- Nayar, Kuldip. *The Judgment: Inside Story of the Emergency in India*. New Delhi: Vikas Publication House, 1977.
- Nora, Pierre. *Rethinking France Vol. II: Les Lieux de Mémoire* □: *Space*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Rabinow, Paul, and Nikolas S Rose, eds. *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. New York: New Press, 2003.
- Rai Chowdhuri, Satyabrata. *Leftism in India, 1917-1947*. Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave, 2007.
- Rancière, Jacques. "From Politics to Aesthetics?" *Paragraph* 28, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 13–25. doi:10.3366/para.2005.28.1.13.
- . "The Politics of Aesthetics/The Aesthetics of Politics." *ARTicle* (May 5, 2006).
- . *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Translated by Gabriel Rockhill. London: Continuum, 2004.
- Rao, Amiya, and B. G Rao. *Why Emergency?* New Delhi: Printox, 1977.
- Reid, James H. *Proust, Beckett, and Narration*. Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- "Rightists Make Allahabad Judgement Their Weapon." *New Age*. n.d., Vol. XXIII No. 24 edition. P.C. Joshi Archive. Accessed July 17, 2012.
- Sabhyasachi, ed. *Uttarardh*. 21st ed. Mathura: Saini Press, 1983.
- Schechner, Richard. "There's Lots of Time in Godot." In *Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot*, edited by Harold Bloom. New. Blooms Literary Criticism, 2008.
- Segal, Zohra. "Theatre and Activism in the 1940's." *India International Centre Quaterly* 24, no. 2/3, Crossing Boundaries (Monsoon) (1997): 31–39.
- Tarlo, Emma. *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of India's Emergency*. Orient Blackswan, 2001.
- The Pen in Revolt-Souvenir* □: *Underground Literature Published During the Emergency*. New Delhi: Press Institute of India, 1978.
- Tulpule, Bagaram. "Industrial Relations Bill, 1978-A Critical Overview." *Economic and Political Weekly* XII, no. 41. LABOUR (October 14, 1978).
- Weeks, Kathi. "Life Within and Against Work: Affective Labor, Feminist Critique and Post-Fordist Politics." *Ephemera* Volume 7(1): 233–249, no. Articles. Theory & Politics in Organization (2007).
- . *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

Willett, John. *Brecht in Context*. London: Methuen, 1998.

Wolfreys, Julian. *Transgression: Identity, Space, Time*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Newspapers and Magazines

Balakrishnan, H. "From Naxalbari to Nalgonda." *The Hindu*. May 12, 2004, sec. MAGAZINE.

Butler, Judith. "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street." *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*. Accessed June 25, 2013.

Datta-Ray, Sunanda K. "Inconvenient Prophet-Jayaprakash Narayan," January 31, 2009.

Pal, Swati. "Theatre and Activism: The Agit-Prop Theatre Way," 2012.

Ramakrishnan, Venkitesh. "The Road from Naxalbari." *Frontline*, October 8, 2005.

Reynolds, Ryan. "Moving Targets: Political Theatre in a Post-Political Age." VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008.

Stephens, Alastair. "An Introduction to Rosa Luxemburg's The Mass Strike." *Counterfire*. Accessed May 16, 2013.

"Emergency!" *New Age*. 1975, Vol. XXIII No. 26 edition. P.C. Joshi Archive.

Interviews

Personal Interview with Ajeet Bahadur. Allahabad, 2012.

Personal Interview with K.K. Pandey. Mp3. Katra, Allahabad, 2012.

Personal Interview with Kaushal Kishore. Mp3. NCZCC, Allahabad, 2012.

Personal Interview with Moloyshee Hashmi. Mp3. May Day Cafe, Shadi Khampur, Delhi, 2012.

Personal Interview with Mukhtar Ahmad. 22 Kaisar Baag; Communist Party of India, Lucknow Office, 2012.

Personal Interview with Nandal Hitaeshi. Prayag Book Fair, 2012.

Personal Interview with Pankaj Srivastav. New Ashok Nagar, New Delhi, 2013.

Personal Interview with Prof. Sanjay Dutta Roy, June 6, 2012.

Personal Interview with Prof. Sanjay Saxena, December 4, 2012.

Personal Interview with Zia-ul Haq. Allahabad, 2012

Websites

www.jstor.org

www.epw.in

www.thehindu.com

www.ephemeraweb.org.