

**IN SEARCH OF COMMUNITY: A JOURNEY
THROUGH CHILDREN'S THEATRE**

*Dissertation Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of*

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To the best of our knowledge, this dissertation, in part or full, has not previously been submitted for any other degree in this or any other university and/or institution. This work is an original one on her part.

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বাবা-কে, যিনি আমাকে প্রশ্ন করতে শিখিয়েছেন

To my father who taught me to question

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Introduction

The dissertation maps a journey in search of a belief in community living, through the variations of children's theatre, practised in Kolkata and adjacent suburban areas.

Any humane creation –conscious or not- that enables the creator and receiver to understand their positions in the society better by illuminating the relationships and analysing the dynamics, existing -physically or virtually- in the spatio-temporal location, and enables an individual to identify with another's life and ascertain what one has not been yet but has the potential of being, is art. In art there is always a journey, from near to distant, from known to unknown, from preset to future. This journey calls for transformation. This transformation is dreaded by those who are in power because it poses a threat to their possibility of sustaining the power position. In guiding the path through which change may come any art practice can be a potential area of dissent against oppression.

The sheer bodily co-presence of actors and spectators¹ makes theatre even more effective in terms of delivering ideas and imaginations. Controlling ideas and imaginations is crucial for sustaining power and more so in case of children who are the potential citizens. Theatre is therefore used by those in power to spread ideas that suit their interests and also by those who countered them.

The dissertation focuses on the analyses of the prevalent and conventional modes² of children's theatre practices in the research area and a case study, a particular children's theatre workshop, titled Shishu Kishore Bikash Mela. The aim is to figure out if children's theatre can be a medium of building communities today and how should that communities be.

THE RAISON D'ÊTRE

'Desocialization' of economic exchanges (Touraine 1998) and melting down of concrete institutions (Bauman 2000) cause identities to become fluid and vulnerable. Social thinkers propose a process of inculcating a sense of being together in this context. A community not based on any ascribed status like race, ethnicity, nationality etc but on mutual respect, responsibility and acknowledgment of difference, is aspired for. This is not a journey towards the pre-modern *Gemeinschaft*, a structure that follows "...society produces individuals who

¹ This division often gets diffused in current theatre practices.

² These modes are formulated, clubbing the varied practices, for analytic purpose and they are not always mutually exclusive..

are similar but unequal” but towards one where the idea is to be equal and different (Touraine 1998). Theatre practitioners argue that the process of working together –sharing emotional, rational, intellectual and physical space- in theatre is apt for building community.

Theatre has acted as a medium for giving voice to the marginal and passive ones³ and children over the world are a marginal category, being always spoken for and represented.

The objective of this research is to investigate whether theatre can instil community ethos amongst the children and if can enable children, coming from different backgrounds, to survive in their realities and attempt to transform it⁴ for better. When the effort of the global forces is to turn conscious people into passive consuming masses can theatre infiltrate a sense of critical self-conscious identity, especially in the children who are in the phase of discovering their personalities? Mainstream education system often ignores this task of imparting knowledge towards critical thinking and collective living and this has a political-ideological⁵ footing. Relationship amongst theatre, education system and politics-ideology is an important one which is hardly talked about.

Children’s participation in Bengali theatre has a long history⁶ but the particular genre namely “Children’s Theatre” is a relatively new phenomenon. This term is used to indicate theatres where children are the actors and their participation is the most important factor in deciding the flow of the process/play, though the facilitation may come from adults. This is not just theatre ‘for’ children or theatre ‘by’ children⁷. Children’s theatre as a separate mode started its journey in the early 70’s emerged and was in full swing from the end of 1980’s.

In West Bengal various modes of children’s theatre are practised today, like workshops in and beyond schools, theatre classes conducted by certain institutions, separate theatre groups, children’s theatre groups, NGOs working with children with theatrical tools etc. These categories are not mutually exclusive and are found operating in various combinations. The

³Augusto Boal, after Freire, is the pioneer of the conceptualization of ‘dialogue’ in theatre and following him there are people working with communities to help them acquire a voice. The Kamirithu is an apt example.

⁴This is regarded as the highest goal theatre might achieve, bring social transformation.

⁵Every ideology has its political impact though it may not be apparent all the time.

⁶The theatre of late nineteenth and early twentieth century had seen the presence of young boys and girls on stage of main stream theatre. Many of the female stars like Nati Binodini came to the domain of theatre at an early age.

⁷However, there are several variations we can see today like having a mixed cast of both children and adults or forms like Grips theatre or theatre without a concrete script developed through improvisation while adults act as facilitators.

number of skilled facilitators engaged in children's theatre is quite limited here therefore the same person can be seen working in different modes.

This repertoire of children's theatre in West Bengal, which has gained immense importance from the last two decades, lacks substantial documentation. Except for a great number of fragmented articles, written by various people expressing their thoughts, ideas and experiences about their encounter with children's theatre, there is hardly any archived material. The practitioners often use writings coming mainly from Europe and North America as their theoretical base. While being useful initially this causes the problem of applying theories in incongruously. Practitioners, engrossed in those theories, often overlook minute nuances of the field.

The primary questions this dissertation attempts to pose are: if children's theatre has any relevance today? What goal of children's theatre is aspired for? If at all children's theatre can infuse a sense of community living amongst the participants and what are the strategies used to do this? The unique socio-political and economic implications of the community in the larger frame of reality also need to be analyzed.

In retrospection of the two decades of children's theatre practices, it is timely to pose these questions now.

The key terms are: children, theatre, community, education, politics, economy and efficacy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Victor Turner, as quoted by Petra Kupperts and Gwen Robertson in 'The Community Performance Reader' (Kupperts and Robertson 2007), identified 'communitas', the core of any community, as "a limit experience: as a state of being with others that transcends difference. In this state, it is easy to feel warmth and love towards others". But if the community feelings cannot 'transcend' the differences the possibility of 'warmth and love' gets diminished leading to the possible breaking of the community. Community in this sense can be a closed, dominating space that provides a sense of belonging, a security perhaps, at the expense of complete conformity. Gerard Delanty (Delanty 2007) explains that for Habermas this idea of community was unacceptable and rather he said community should be based on 'communication' that "is open-ended and is the basis of all social action... the communicative process always resists closure and thus ultimately resists domination".

This very conception of communication, a democratic exchange of experiences and ideas, which ideally, enrich those who are communicating, echoes in Paolo Freire's works too. He (Freire 1970) mentioned how from the sheer structure of the unilateral dissemination of information, domination is established and how knowledge should emanate from dialogue in order to be liberating. If imparting knowledge is the goal of the system namely, 'Education' Freire argued that it must lead to "conscientization" which refers to the ability to take action against oppressive elements of reality. An educated person, stated Freire, "being conscious, is supposed to question, unmask and try to abolish the source of oppression" (Freire 1970).

Commonsensibly the role of education is to prepare a person to cope with the reality, for now and future. And if students fail then often the blame is put on the students, their inability to learn, their family and cultural background. Educationalist John Holt, though, had to offer a different reason. He argued, that children⁸ fail because they are "afraid, bored and confused"- afraid of disappointing others, bored of things, they are taught for not appealing to their interest, and confused because "most of the torrent of words that pours over them in school makes little or no sense. It often flatly contradicts other things they have been told..." (Holt 1964).

Dorothy Heathcote said education proceeds effectively when the teacher- student relationship resembles one between experts, where teachers ask students to share their knowledge as experts and solve problems (Dorothy Heathcote 1996). Dr. Brian Edmiston quotes Etienne Wenger (Edmiston n.d.), "learning ... is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming a certain person." Here the process is more important than the product.

Participatory problem solving procedures as a medium of gathering knowledge, where the process of solving is more important than the solution, recurs as an alternative model of education. Roger Wooster (Wooster 2007), Helen Nicholson (Nicholson 2009) and Tony Jackson (Jackson 1993) traced the genesis of this approach in the post-war West as a mixture of two ideas; 'child-centred education' and 'effective learning through play'. The legacy of both agitprop and community theatre, where the main objective was to democratize the medium, had profound influence on what emerged as 'Theatre in Education' or TIE.

⁸ The failure of the students in this age group can be concretely seen through the dropout rates which at the very beginning of their life impose an exclusionary impact on them.

By the late 70's however, the excitement with education as a liberating medium started dying and there were massive budget cuts in TIE programmes in the West (Wooster 2007). While TIE was actually acquiring credentials in the Third World countries as India, Bangladesh etc, a separate mode of theatre was developing in the West namely, Community Theatre. Syed Jamil Ahmed⁹ argued that the in non-western countries community theatre took a new name, theatre for development. He said Tfd projects by NGOs, generally funded by western enterprises with the idea of developing the 'underdeveloped', actually serve "globalisation in the name of poverty alleviation" (Ahmed 2002). The entire developmental discourse, obscuring its political core, manifesting through children's theatre where the chance of doubt and critique, coming from the participant is lesser has to be discussed in the particular spatiotemporal zone of research. Advocating Tfd without contextualizing appears to be a problem.

Theatre with prison inmates, where the goal is to bring them back to the mainstream, may act as a therapeutic tool (Ryan 1976) oriented towards the reduction of the rate of re-arrest¹⁰ or as a 'complementary rite of passage' that enables re-creation of the world-image which is strategically destroyed by the incarceration (Kendig 1993). The basic difference between these two varieties (Tfd and prison theatre) is basically the conceptualization of the deprivation and the envisioned development. James Thompson commented how these conceptualizations are severe political constructs and often utilised for international political agenda¹¹ (Thompson 2009).

Use of theatre as a medium to induce activism has a long existing legacy that finds major support from Boal in activating the audience (Boal 1979). Following Freire, if 'hope' is the weapon against the neo-liberal dogmatism and 'curiosity', the urge to know how to be

⁹Syed Jamil Ahmed is the faculty of Department of Theatre and Music, in University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

¹⁰What in noticeable here is the attempt is not as much to reduce criminal activity rather to reduce the rate of re-arrest. The possible implications can be either, the theatre training enables the participants to become so skilled that they can successfully hide themselves and not get caught or the only way to measure the effect of theatre training is in the rate of arrest due to the lack of any other concrete database. In both cases it is highly probable to draw faulty conclusion.

¹¹He gives the example of a theatre workshop in Sri Lanka in 2000. Three months after theatre workshop in Bindunuwewa rehabilitation center for surrendered child soldier, 27 Tamil boy and young men were killed by neighboring villagers. Thompson analyses how this workshop was a part of the nation's project of portraying a humanist face which enraged the Sinhalese for they thought the government was giving the dissenting Tamils more opportunities than native Sinhalese. Later this massacre also gets exploited by the state.

liberated (Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom 1998), theatre is often proved to be the medium of the search for a change.

THE STARTING POINT

The use of theatre as a medium for education is a globally accepted phenomenon. While formal educational institutions generally provide theoretical knowledge, theatre is said to provide not only the knowledge which complements the former, but also the secured space to experiment with it. “[A] person’s ability to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”, a quality termed as ‘Psychosocial Competence’ can be best achieved by the use of ‘role-play’ says WHO in their 1994 article, titled ‘Programme on Mental Health’. This quality enables one to take full responsibility of one’s action. From this standpoint education along with theatre as a medium is liberating. But in reality this is often not the case.

One of the intervening concepts used in this context would be Freire’s, “there is not teaching without learning”(Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom 1998) which he propounded elaborately in his last book, ‘Pedagogy of Freedom’. This idea is based on his lifelong advocacy of dialogic structure of education. This formulation brings forth two distinct notions: teacher as students and students as teachers. The process of children’s theatre should be a liberating one where the voice of the children should get utmost importance even at the level of compromising the quality of the play, if necessary. Rudraprasad Sengupta, one of the pioneers of children’s theatre in West Bengal advocates the primacy of “joyous creation” in the process. The content of a play may talk about liberating children from imposed social expectations, but at the level of the process, the rehearsals, how democratic it is, how far the children’s opinion are incorporated, if the facilitator aspires to learn from the children or takes up the role of a dominant persona to enhance the quality of the production, are areas to be investigated.

The next concept would be much advocated claims for free creative expression of children. How far this need of creativity is felt by the children and what hindrances they face is to be studied carefully because often adults assume that children need something and act accordingly. If imposed by the adults no creative expression of children can claim to be called ‘free’.

Children’s theatre avowedly has a different goal than the theatre of the adult. Ideally it is a process-oriented practice where the sheer participation is supposed to bestow upon the participants the skills of empathy, negotiation, confidence, cooperation, creative expression

etc. The process of developing a play reflects the ideological stand of the facilitator, the conditions of the participants and the final goal. The content of the play may not be based on any prominent issue¹² but the choice of the process has deep socio-political and economic implications.

Peggy Phelan argued that theatre ontologically defies the system of reproduction (Phelan 1993) which compels it to stand in opposition to the neo-liberal cultural industrialisation. Moreover, the idea of process over product in children's theatre, poses it in opposition to the global trend of commercialization where the product is commodified and incorporated in the culture industry. The resistance to commodification makes children's theatre a potential threat to the market economy. In this context supporting theatre, directly or indirectly by the neo-liberal governments or NGOs, appears to be a paradox.

Three basic questions arise from this:

- a) Preferring process over product is the ideal conceptualization of children's theatre. Does it correspond to the practices in reality?
- b) Radical theatre questions any form of domination but when theatre gets support from government whom it is supposed to critique, the criticality of the theatre needs to be scrutinized. What are the adjustments and compromises theatre practices must make to gain support in terms of funding?
- c) By providing monetary support the funding bodies often gain an upper hand in determining the proceedings of theatre. Fear of losing the fund may compel one to take an un-critical, conformist stand. Is then providing funds another means of exercising control?

How children's theatre negotiates with political and economic forces for survival and support has to be examined. The form this intervention is going to take in the research is to inquire the theatrical practices in the focused area, what are the expected thematic of the theatre, their connection to the broader framework, and the procedural details¹³.

The final question this research is going to pose is how do the theatre practitioners envision the transformation of the reality in favour of freer artistic expression? An individual acquiring

¹²Workshops organized by NGOs often have issue based plays that attempts to deliver a particular message.

¹³The processes of workshops. Not just the exercises but their reactions and how are they dealt with in the broader frame of the workshops.

skills of cooperation, togetherness often faces challenges in reality beyond the workshop-space. The objective at this stage is to figure out what kind of changes, if any, theatre practitioners have in mind for better functioning of children's theatre. The tactics and strategies adopted by the theatre practices to create a safe niche for freer expression are to be found out (Thompson 2009).

The three questions, mentioned above, point towards one basic inquiry, why children's theatre? Broadly, why choosing theatre over several other art forms in such a massive way?

The answer this dissertation would explore might have local resonances emerging from the research area but that can hopefully be linked to the broader theoretical discourses.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research, undertaken, requires analysis of the structural variations and the reasons behind these variations.

Conceptualizing "children" as a category is a methodological problem, because firstly, they are not a homogeneous group and secondly, the prime factor that decides whether a human being is a child or not, i.e. age is an arbitrarily set marker which often fails to reflect the condition of a person. Seen from another perspective, children's theatre often has an idea of children, an essence of 'childhood', formulated, which then is approached through theatre. Children coming from different socio-economic backgrounds have very different experiences of life. On one hand a generally formulated all-encompassing theatrical model is therefore bound to leave gaps as identifying with one large structure might not be possible for all, on another differently oriented theatre programmes keep the participating children separated. There can be no universal solution to this problem. The varied strategies used by theatre practitioners to deal with this problem are to be figured out during the course of the research.

Examination of the expected efficacy of theatre - the effect theatre is supposed to have on the participants¹⁴ is necessary. Does theatre endow the participants with the skills to survive in their realities? James Thompson put forward the doubt that what benefit would a child get from a theatre workshop that teaches one to be more cooperative and caring while continue to live in an area where experiencing violence is a daily phenomenon. The apparently universal, aspired effects of theatre need to be contextualised.

¹⁴This effect is more prominent amongst the children, argued by many theorists, because childhood is the time for formation of the 'self' which provides the base for the personality s/he is going to acquire

The following task is to figure out how to measure the efficacy of theatre. If the process of theatre making is of utmost importance and the performance is a mere reflection of the skills, new tools for analysing the process has to be developed. Questions like- how to begin a discussion, how to adapt stock tools according to the situation, how can participation be enhanced during the rehearsals, how to initiate and not forcefully introduce a debate etc that haunt a theatre practitioner demand a different frame of reference than simply analysing a performance which is a finished product.

A part of this research is going to focus on a particular children's theatre workshop, Shishu Kishore Bikash Mela, which happens once a year after the Durga Puja. This residential theatre workshop uses children's theatre as a tool to inculcate the faith in community living, said an organizer. Accepting those seven days as the zenith he argued the entire process of collecting money, circulating information etc as inseparable parts of the workshop. While advantageously the organizers are available for interviewing there is hardly any written account on the ideological stand behind this workshop, its relations to the broader frame of theatre practice and its strategies to avoid both institutionalisation and penalisation¹⁵. Thorough documentation of the workshop will form a part of the research process.

Eventually the question about the features and attributes of the 'community', theatre seeks to construct is to be scrutinized along with the label of 'community'. The term having a deep-rooted sociological connotation might breed misunderstanding and hence needs to be re-delineated. Words, often used as synonyms of community- collectivity, group, collaboration, association, network, etc- has to be comparatively analysed in order to check which particular term can encapsulate the ethos more aptly and how. Practitioners are likely to have different choices of the word along with the problem of being translated into another language¹⁶.

In depth interviews with the theatre practitioners, the child participants, guardians can be used as a substitute of the archived materials. However, there are documents containing the names of several plays and most of the people who were engaged in those productions can be interviewed. From these documents probably a pattern of themes of plays can be deduced.

This research will be an amalgamation of both inductive and deductive processes. From theories basic tenure of children's theatre can be deduced and while applying them in a

¹⁵These, as said by an organizer, are the two ways of exercising control over artistic activities.

¹⁶Bengali is the primary spoken language of the research area and might have different terms to denote the gathering imagined through theatre.

different spatiotemporal zone new ideas are likely to be induced. Ideas like community building through children's theatre, children's theatre as a political act etc which are often left at the background are to be discussed.

The research views the phenomenon of children's theatre from two sides. It tries to analyse the practices of children's theatre by posing them next to its theories. On the other hand it also tries to check the validity of the theories in the specific research area. The chapters of this dissertation are arranged according to this idea. While the first chapter deals with the ideas, theories and legacy of children's theatre the second chapter aims more at the local practices in this domain, their variations, implications and impact. The third chapter is a case study of a particular workshop which is an amalgamation of both the ideas and theories stated in the first chapter and has derived many features from the practices dealt with in the second chapter.

Chapter 1:

The first chapter will attempt to historicize the genre of children's theatre as it emerged in West Bengal in the early 70s. How this is influenced by the changes in perceiving education and theatre in the West and local legacies of theatre. This will also attempt to map out the brief history of the children's participation in theatre in Bengal and how are they different from the separately demarcated genre of 'children's theatre' which is practised today. How the 'children' as a category is been formulized as a model and approached through theatre will also form the content of this segment.

Chapter 2:

Two models of children's theatre practices will be created on the basis of the theoretical body they draw from, the target population, aspired goals, processes etc- theatre in schools as a medium of education and as a subject and theatre beyond the school spaces. The idea of "deprived" children who form a significant portion of the children associated with theatre and their relations with the obscure notion of the 'ideal' also needs to be investigated here. Their negotiations with the political forces will be discussed along with an analysis of the validity of such compartmentalization. How far can a community ethos be built through these processes, is to be examined along with the analysis of why this ethos is deemed as ideal condition for flourishing of creativity and freedom.

Chapter 3:

A theatre workshop, as a case study, which employs strategies used by other two models and creates some of its own and thus demands a separate place is the content of this chapter. The strategies it employs to achieve the goal of infusing community values through theatre are to be analysed. Another workshop, organized by the same organizers, with adolescents¹⁷, will be touched upon in order to show that if the ideology behind the first workshop is continued in to the second, which might ensure the formation of a sustainable working community.

Conclusion:

The research does not aim for any conclusive end of the debate: 'if community can be built through theatre'. Rather it attempts to provide a small analytical mapping of possibilities existing in a particular geo-temporal location. How the potentialities can exist, flourish and transform the reality is to be seen during the research.

¹⁷ Most of them have taken part in the Shishu Kishore Bikash Mela when they were younger.

Chapter 1

WHERE IS CHILDREN'S THEATRE? HISTORICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXTUALISATION

The entry point of a dissertation such as this requires empathy, through contextualization and building up a logical argument. This chapter aims at that. It tries to deal with two versions of the question posed as the title; 'Where is children's theatre?' The first refers to the actual location of the research area-i.e. Kolkata and adjacent suburbs where children's theatre is practised. The second version is a more abstract question of 'Has children's theatre, practised in this area, actually made its presence felt to the worldwide children's theatre scenario in terms of i?' In the larger ideological framework where do these practices appear? In that case it requires not only a description of children's theatre practices in the research zone but also its historical legacy.

The research aspires to analyse the viability of children's theatre and its potential of emanating faith in community as a way of living in the face of the individualistic existence of human being. Participation of children in theatre and other performing genres like pantomime, acrobatics, circus etc has a long history but 'children's theatre' as a separate genre is a relatively new phenomenon which germinated in close ties with the notions of education and development. The research attempts not to establish a new theoretical understanding rather to see the practices of the specified research area, through the mesh of larger theoretical framework.

This particular chapter aims at laying out the basic understanding necessary to grasp the realities of children's theatre practices of the research area by marking its uniqueness. A comparison will be drawn between the situation of West Bengal and the U.K. which played a pioneer role in the domain of children's theatre all over the world. This comparative model not only provides a chance to delineate the various strategies implemented in different situations, the socio-economic and political factors causing them but would help to point out the large looming ideas which operate largely as homogenizing forces in the realm of children's theatre and often elevate the practices to the edge of absurdity.

'Children' as a concept is quite complex as it draws strands from the fields of biology, economics, sociology, politics, culture, laws and legality. The post-colonial experience, immense growth of population and rampant poverty make the situation more critical in India. Socio-political upheavals like the 'Partition' in case of Bengal forced complete reconceptualization of life itself. Three major concepts of this research- 'children', 'community' and 'theatre'- cannot therefore be culled out from this complicated backdrop without considering the operating forces of politics, economics, culture, legal policies etc.

Not only the conceptualisation of these notions but their understanding, growth, implementation, transformation etc as well depends largely on these forces and is specific to the local scenario. A generalizing overview of the expected attributes of these notions not only jeopardize the chance of a fuller understanding of their operations but also hinder all possibilities of transforming them for better.

Therefore, this chapter would aim at first to place the concepts in both their conceptual and practical geo-temporal locations. The attempt then would be to try to figure out whether the drive of emanating community ethos can really be a part of the agenda of children's theatre.

Defining 'Children':

Ever since this particular research project has been conceptualized, one of the daunting problems had been of delineating the boundaries of childhood, understanding the notion 'children'. The problem is not the scarcity of definitions rather the abundance of them. It is therefore attempted in this section to discuss the varied ways of understanding childhood and through it arrive at an agreeable definition. It is absolutely necessary to figure the definition to have a better grasp over another idea that forms the core of this project namely 'children's theatre'.

The term 'child' can be defined from three different angles which are however, not mutually exclusive. Legally a child is "a human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Though apparently solid and clear this definition fails to be absolute by taking into consideration the idea of 'majority' of the population. In case of any circumstance – war, riot, natural calamity etc- if the population of the people whose age is more than 18, decrease markedly and those under 18 constitute the majority of the population the definition of children as people below the age of eighteen would not stand valid¹⁸. What gets left out in this definition is that it was created for a particular convention and therefore pose problem in universal applicability. The definition was actually "For the Purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier"¹⁹. As the former part of the definition, "For the purpose of the Convention", gets overlooked it acquires

¹⁸This, however, shows an often obscured relation between children and society and how the latter exploits the former in the times of crises in when the former becomes substitute of adults.

¹⁹ <http://wcd.nic.in/crcpdf/crc-2.pdf>.

Accessed on 12.3.2013

a status of universal applicability. Thus the entire process of conceptualizing childhood takes a pyramidal shape where the idea comes from one particular location and gets applied universally without any consideration to the spatio-temporal diversities. Thus by the time it penetrates other locations²⁰ it gets so much refracted through the prism of socio-cultural differences that the idea acquires a homogenizing power and almost inapplicable in specific contexts. For instance in India in 2000 the age of consent²¹ was raised from 16 to 18, keeping parance with the global convention which is mainly constructed and led by the developed countries of West, USA and UK. However, in a highly populated and poor country like India young members of the family enter the economic sphere much earlier than their Western counterparts. The break between the reality and the conceptual straight-jacketing became prominent after the debate regarding juvenile crime laws after the gang rape case last year²², following which many argued that the age should be brought down to 16 again. This was not an indication that just by bringing the age down this problem would be resolved rather conveying prominently that global concepts often fail to find applicability in local issues.

Biologically a child is anyone between birth and puberty²³ or one who is not of age to have children²⁴. As general an idea as this almost risks being futile. Though procreation is one of the major attributes of living organisms, human beings cannot be defined solely by procreating ability because its existence is far more complex especially in the era of advanced technologies. Moreover, adults having various physical inabilities which hinder their procreating capability do not mean that they are biologically children. Due to various issues like environmental change, change of food habits and life style etc the age of attaining puberty has come down remarkably but this necessarily does not mean that -judging by this factor- one ceases to be a child comparatively early. The primary reason of this is that, more than legal or biological; 'childhood' and 'child' are social concepts.

'Childhood' and 'children' as notions almost never gets defined considering the political forces which often influences factors defining children. There remains such a huge disparity

²⁰ Locations from where the idea did not originate.

²¹The age of consent indicates the minimum age which a person is considered to be legally competent to consent to sexual acts.

²²16thDecember, 2013 a physiotherapy student of 23 was gang raped by six people in a bus in Delhi. Five of them were convicted but the sixth who was most brutal came in the centre of a debate as he was a minor, 17+ at the time of the crime.

²³ Oxford Dictionary

²⁴ <http://en.cyberdodo.com/files/definition-of-the-child/2.html>. accessed on 13.3.2013

between children as a concept in the policies and young people living their realities that one can rightfully ask whether 'children' exist at all beyond the papers of policies. These policies which are created to ensure the rights and security of the children often become so distant from the real existence of the children that the implementation causes more harm than doing any good. Manik Das (Das 2008) gave an example of how the problem of orphan and street children was resolved in Curitiba, a city in Brazil where the government pursued small and large factories and institutions to adopt one child each. The child is supposed to work in those organisations and the latter in turn would not only give salary but also ensure the security of the child. Now, this incident stands starkly against the agenda of demolishing child labour but offers a practical and valid opportunity for livelihood of the children of the city. The universal ideal of abolishing child labour seems futile if not harmful where the nation takes away the right to work and could not give a sustainable alternative of survival. This impracticality at the level of policy not only poses a threat to the young who have no other option than to sell labour to survive but also renders any chance of these children to be independent at least economically and acquire a stable condition in a generation or two, impossible.

Moreover, by making child labour illegal the state not only curtails their job opportunities but also makes these children marginal. They lay different from the mainstream children, thus in need of special treatment, support from the policies, target of NGOs which makes the dividing lines even deeper. What these children have lost in life and how this loss can be compensated- this is given so much importance that any agency that these children could have had is completely washed out from the scene of possibility. By forcing them to be dependent and in need of welfare the state ensures its right to interfere and control these people.

This is not a recent phenomenon but a continuing trend where the state monopolizes the authority to define a concept and try to obliterate everything that does not fit into the schema. Conceptualisation as a process not only reflects the social scenario it emerged out of but also the journey of that particular society.

Tracing the history of the notion of 'childhood', Philippe Aries(Aries 1962) in his book 'Centuries of Childhood- A Social History of Family Life' had said regarding the representation of childhood and children in art, "... right up to the end of the thirteenth century, there are no children characterized by a special expression but only men on a

reduced scale". Childhood was considered to be a fleeting part of human life which was not worth to be remembered whether a child dies²⁵ or grows up. Aries elaborated (Aries 1962) on how age as an absolute marker of one's existence was not much in parlance till the beginning of the seventeenth century rather there were stages mentioned as "ages of life" which was one of the "...common ways of understanding human biology..." another piece of information, though not exact, to place one in accordance with the world beyond an individual body. The stages were relational in terms, "... in accord with the universal system of correspondences". In the sixth book of the medieval text, '*Le Grand Propriétaire de toutes choses*' it says:

"The first age is childhood when the teeth are planted, and this age begins when the child is born and lasts until seven, and in this age that which is born is called an infant, which is as good as saying not talking, because in this age it cannot talk well or form its words perfectly, for its teeth are not yet well arranged or firmly implanted... After infancy comes the second age... it is called *pueritia* and is given this name because in this age the person is still like the pupil in the eye... and this age lasts till fourteen.

Afterwards follow the third age, which is called adolescence which ends [either] in the twenty first year [or] twenty eight... and it can go on till thirty or thirty five."(Aries 1962)

These classifications seem not only obsolete but ridiculous today but for its contemporary societies these stratifications were rational, logical and probably socially accepted. Interestingly in these classifications there is no effort to pinpoint one's age rather the idea is to give an age-range that allows flexibility and defies any attempt to make age specific to identify a person.

Aries showed how age gradually became an important marker of one's identity. While "[T]he Christian name belongs to the world of fancy, the surname that of tradition... age, a quantity legally measurable to within a few hours, comes from another world, that of precise figures" (Aries 1962).

"A man's 'age' was a scientific category of the same order as weight or speed for our contemporaries; it formed part of a system of physical description and explanation which went back to the ... 6th century B.C" (Aries 1962). But age has gained a different status as an

²⁵Rate of child mortality was very high on those days.

attribute not only describing a person but identifying her/him. The difference between weight, speed and age is that the latter cannot be reduced like the first two as it is related to the unidirectional notion of time. Moreover, a slow moving panther or light-weighted elephant may not get any special treatment for their speciality but age can put a person in socially accepted, advantageous or disadvantaged positions.

The reason behind dealing with the notion of age, not age in concrete terms, is to propose that viewing age is a socially constructed phenomenon. The arbitrariness of age as a marker is twofold: firstly, conceptualising age, being a social fact is not organically linked to the actual age of any organism and secondly, age does not always necessarily indicate the stage of life a human being is in as it only denotes the age of the body and not of the mind, precisely the space where one's identity is formed.

In order to define what a 'child' is, one needs to try and map the different layers of ideas this particular term induces in one's mind. The Furetière Dictionary mentioned, in the beginning of the eighteenth century that the term 'child' is "... also a term of friendship used to greet or flatter someone or to induce him to do something". On the other hand same term is used by the superiors to call their subordinates.

"A master will say to his men when setting them to work: "Come along, children, get to work." A captain will say to his soldiers:"Courage, children, stand fast". Front-line troops, those most exposed to danger, were called 'the lost children'. "(Aries 1962)

Very apparent in this reference is the operation of power in defining one's position as a child or one who can call others so. The first British branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, founded in Liverpool in 1883 defined children as "boys and girls of tender age, but may, in case of need, be extended to include all young persons who are unable to protect themselves."²⁶

The basic criterion for deciding whether an individual is a child has probably been always measured- perceptibly or not- in terms of one's dependence on others. This dependence can be caused by physical infirmity and/or mental immaturity both of which being relative terms fail to attribute any certain feature to "child" as an idea. A 'child' as an idea is always identified in relation to the adults, shaped in a hierarchy by notions like teacher, master,

²⁶ The Saturday Review, 17 May, 1884, p. 643

parents, the people having more power. One who is dependent, never up-to-the-mark, subservient, innocent (read unable to grasp the complexities of reality) is a child. This notion of child as dependent entity gets complicated with the entry of 'age', an arbitrary criterion, universally accepted as the marker of life stages

However, one has to either abide by a specific idea or create a new one for better understanding of a phenomenon associated with the idea. In this context to understand 'children's theatre' a workable conceptualization of the very complex term, 'children', is necessary. Creating a new idea of 'children' is not taken up as a task because it is not the aim of this research. In that case it seems rational to take the legal definition of 'children' because that definition determines who are worthy of getting certain benefits under certain state policies. But there also lies a problem. According to Indian law regarding child labour the age limit is of 14 years²⁷ where the age to vote, drive, having legal representation is 18 years. Furthermore the age of consent for a girl is 18 while for a boy it is 21²⁸. After the gang rape case last year demands arose from various sections to decrease the age of consent from 18 to 16 years. Funny though, the age to be a legally accepted buyer of alcohol from registered shops is 22 to 26, depending on the locality. Yet, as the majority would argue and the law as per which policies are implemented, childhood ends as one turns 18, to be precise one ceases to be a 'minor' and is legally given the right to own and transmit property. In a society where private property is the prevalent mode of ownership, it is no wonder that the human life will be measured in its terms. 18, therefore, gets accepted here i.e. in this research project as the age when one becomes an adult without any attempt to cover up the fact that this generalization makes the job of a researcher more difficult.

The crucial question is if childhood indicates a period- temporary or otherwise- of relative powerlessness and dependence then how is its association with theatre, ideally an empowering endeavour, a possibility? Does it not contradict the entire existence of a practise called 'children's theatre'? If not, then how these concepts get transformed when correlated, needs to be analysed.

²⁷ "Articles 24, 39 and 45 mentions about protection of children from being employed in hazardous employment, protection against moral and material abandonment, and provision of free compulsory education for all children up to 14 years of age." This free education issue for children within the age of 6-14 was inserted after the 86th Amendment in 2006.

²⁸As if age is gender biased and bestows a girl with maturity much earlier than it does so to a boy.

Understanding Children and Theatre

Childhood is regarded, both biologically and sociologically, to be the formative period of human beings. This is the time when the new born gradually learns various strategies to cope with the world that lies beyond its body. Most important of them is the attempt to communicate with other entities, evaluate the reaction of the communication and in the process arrive with a 'self'. Symbolic Interactionists like Georg Herbert Mead says that without interaction, formation of self is impossible and self-identity is the primary and core-possession of any human being which not only distinguishes her/him from other living creatures including fellow human beings and helps to be situated in a particular spatio-temporal location.

A process of learning which comes naturally and universally to all children is its effort to imitate other's behaviours to generate positive reactions which gradually gives way to what is called 'role-playing'. A child plays the different roles it sees around itself and tries to use the knowledge it had acquired about the roles and their associates to turn a situation into a favourable one because like any living organism the basic drive, no matter how subtle and far-fetched it may seem, is to ensure survival, biological and social.

The initial process of learning thus comes to a child in the mould of play, it is the "natural means" says Caldwell Cook (Cook 1919) and Peter Slade, as quoted by Robert J. Landy (Landy 1982), had said "Whenever there is play, there is drama"²⁹. Drama, says Landy (Landy 1982), literally means 'to do something'. John Dewey had argued for 'learning by doing' as this process is not just the natural one but also more effective and enduring than others like learning through instructions or books. Therefore, drama/play is a natural part of learning.

Drama is not necessarily performed to an audience and theatre unlike drama signifies the gradual development of a product, "... a script that is rehearsed and performed to an audience. The essential ingredients of theatre are actors, script and audience."(Landy 1982) Drama is basic, quotes Landy (Landy 1982) after Gavin Bolton "... because it is concerned with identification."

²⁹ Slade, Peter. *Child Drama*. London: University of London Press, 1954. P-23.

Theatre has an element that drama does not, i.e. the audience, following this line of argument. In case of theatre therefore there is probably a larger chance, in terms of the number of people associated, not only to evaluate one's artistic expertise but also one's ability to put forward one's ideas and expression so that they are communicated to the audience. While in case of drama the communication is within the actors in case of theatre it happens between the actors and the audience. Drama and theatre are different in two levels, conceptual and structural where the former informs the latter. The purpose of drama is a process where for theatre it is something more, a process that ends in a product which often gives it an advantage of presenting one's view in front of the audience. The audience not being associated with the projects may be able to judge how far the message could be transmitted and the significance of the performance. However, excessive focus on the production causes the degradation of the process and sometimes a marvellous performance covers the authoritarian structure of the process as well.

Coleman Jennings in an interview had said: "... dramatization is... having the children create [a] story, not for an audience, but for their own enjoyment." (Landy 1982) However, creating and viewing is not mutually exclusive for the children as they see each other during creation. Moreover, they often like to be seen and appreciated. What Jennings might have hinted at is probably the structured pattern of viewing where one outsider assumes the role of audience to judge the performance, making the situation like an examination. Empathetic viewing, and not sympathetic viewing, enables the children to critically analyse their work and thus be better in the art.

However, in the particular context this research project is conceptualized, Kolkata and the surrounding suburban areas, this distinction between theatre and drama is hardly visible and the former acts as a canopy term to indicate both practices. Partly the fact that in Bengali there is one all encompassing term "Natok" to indicate almost all forms of theatrical activities and partly because drama as a process and an end in itself is not given much importance are major reasons for this situation³⁰. Children's theatre arrived in Bengal as an amalgamation of the trend of children participating in theatre³¹ and the reconceptualization of the relations between children and theatre in the West. Being for the most part a derivative and

³⁰In case of Kolkata and the adjacent suburban areas, the normal trend is to engage in theatrical activities in order to put up a show, a performance and not just merely for the activities per se.

³¹Sheer participation of children in theatre does not make it 'children's theatre'. This would be elaborated later.

consolidated entity, children's theatre in West Bengal³² focussed more on the practises on the basis of Western theories than attempting to develop its own. Here the situation was different and resources had to be adjusted. Therefore it had to adopt forms which are inspired by the West but are completely unique in their own rights.

There are sociological discourses about when a child should be allowed to perform in front of audiences and when it should be restrained from doing so.

In the 1950s... Peter Slade made a case against formal performance before the age of twelve³³. Fearing that it would promote showing-off behaviour [sic], he noted that young children need unrestricted space in which to play... If they were limited to performing to an audience directly in front of them, they would be violating their natural inclinations to move about freely. (Landy 1982)

However, psychologist Jean Piaget had argued that "...readiness to perform is based upon cognitive development³⁴. If we can understand the importance of an integrated cognition, physical and emotional development, we will have an accurate picture of when a child is ready to perform." (Landy 1982) As the cognitive development is rather unique to each individual, the homogenizing drive of generalizing children as an age category and not taking into consideration their specific socio-cultural contexts is problematic. Moreover, in a world which is changing so fast there is no reason to believe in an unchanging essence of children. Rather what is seen to be a common human trend -children and adults- is of showing their skills and be appreciated. Appreciation of one's skill not only gives impetus to further learning but at a deeper level it increases the self-worth of a person and thus forms the basis of learning. However, how and in what form this appreciation is shown and to what extent that leads to the problem of isolation and superiority complex is a contextual question, a general solution to which is not possible.

Childhood being the major period when one starts learning the ways of the world, the primary task of this age can be termed as 'acquiring' and 'formulating knowledge'. A pedagogical debate regarding what is knowledge, or "What's worth Knowing?" (Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner 1969) can be posed here. This has to be kept aside for some other research project in favour of agreeing grossly that techniques and strategies that enable one to

³²When the term came into parlance Bengal was already divided.

³³ Slade, Peter. *Child Drama*. London: University of London Press, 1954.

³⁴ Jean Piaget. *Language and Thought of the Child*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926.

survive in a socio-geographical situation and “...the abilities and attitudes required to deal adequately with change...” (Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner 1969) in a rapidly changing world, is worth knowing and thus form the body of knowledge for that particular person³⁵. The question that comes then is what should be the form of gathering knowledge or to use a term more academic, how is this ‘education’ possible.

John Dewey gets echoed by Cook when he says “A natural education is by practice, by doing things, and not by instructions.”(Cook 1919) A child starts its learning through trial and error process where trying out options is the only way to gather knowledge. This process provides what Michael Polanyi has called “personal knowledge”, knowledge that is deeply embedded in an individual and is unique to her/him. This personal knowledge forms the basis of all a person can be educated with in her/his life as, “[T]he word ‘educate’ is closely related to the word ‘educate’. In the oldest pedagogic sense of the term, this meant drawing out of a person something potential or latent. We can after all, learn only in relation to what we already know.” (Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner 1969).

“If we begin with the assumption that education should enlarge experience, sharpen perception, and increase knowledge, it follows that the theatre may be used as an educational tool. In fact, the potentialities of the theatre are so vast that they are not yet fully understood or envisioned”.(Brockett 1973)

Since education- institutionally authorized or not- is so important for the children to be prepared for the world, drama/theatre can be an excellent tool for them for its obvious association with play. Answering to the question of how the process of drama is educative, Geraldine Siks says,

“Drama is the process through which the child imagines that he or she is a character in action, in a conflict/resolution. Emphasis is on the process, the process of imagining... They’re learning as a play-maker, giving structure and form to what’s in their minds. And as an audience they’re beginning to appreciate this whole thing. The emphasis is on the process of perceiving, imaging, forming or improvising, and communicating and then evaluating.”³⁶

³⁵Content of knowledge might therefore not be same to a group of people because though they might have things in common they are individually unique beings and therefore might have varied needs and aspirations to which true knowledge is to cater.

³⁶WCBS-TV, Sunrise Semester, “Drama in Education: Getting Started.” (September 24 and 26, 1979).

Following Albert Cullum the process of drama is important for children and/or anybody because

“When children or anyone goes through this drama process in an honest way, it really is a rebirth of liking oneself. And to me, that is the foundation of learning. You have to like yourself first, and then there’s room for other things to go in.”(Landy 1982)

Dewey’s belief that “we learn what we do” gets echoed by Marshall McLuhan when he says “the medium is the message” which has a deep connotation in case of drama/theatre for children and/or adults as well.

Drama theorists have often said that in case of drama/theatre the process is more important than the production which is the product and I find it to be a valid argument. It is the continuing process where all the possible options of solving a crisis are weighed against each other and in the course newer options are likely to emerge while in case of the performance it is a finished product, already structured to some extent and therefore is less prone to change. It is similar to a class situation where the process of developing a drama is like having classes which is the prime time when one learns something and the production is like having an examination which is an one-time verification of how much did the participants learn and this often fails to do justice with the learning process. On a deeper level an element that goes unnoticed in a class situation is that new lessons are understood, verified and accumulated on the basis of pre-acquired knowledge. In case of a drama scenario this becomes visible because here knowledge is gathered by doing and not by listening which is, unfortunately, the general trend of classroom learning. The rehearsal or the process of developing a drama is about here and now, the fact that it can be stopped at any moment and reviewed connects it with the immediate presence of the performers. On the other hand a performance is the projection of many-times-tried-then-finished process; it is relatively more about past.

“[D]rama is an active, everyday process of human enactment... it is spontaneous... social... it concerns rehearsing, previewing, and reviewing experience...” says Robert J. Landy (Landy 1982). If we take in account the concept of ‘impression management’ propounded by Erving Goffman we will realise that we use dramatic tools like role-playing on a daily basis for survival. In case of children it is more prominent because due to their relative lack of knowledge about the ways of the world they not only try to adjust but also to understand the

principles which then gradually are internalized and become spontaneous. "It would not be wise to send a child innocent into the big world; and talking is of poor avail. But it is possible to hold rehearsals, to try out strength in a make-believe big world" (Cook 1919). This opportunity is given by drama/theatre.

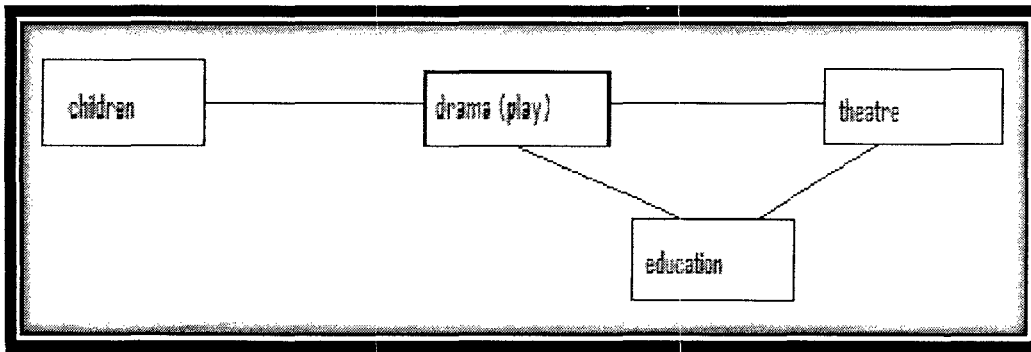
One term used by American educators to describe the process of learning through drama is 'creative drama, a term coined by Winifred Ward. According to the Children's Theatre Association of America:

"Creative Drama is an improvisational, non-exhibitional, process-centred form of drama in which participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact and reflect upon human experiences. Built on the human impulse and ability to act out perceptions of the world in order to understand it, creative drama requires both logical and intuitive thinking, personalizes knowledge, and yields aesthetic pleasure"(Jed H. Davis, Tom Behm 1978)

However, this special categorization might rightfully seem unnecessary to many because it is hard to discern creative drama from non-creative drama. Any process where many people-children or adults- come together to develop an idea, sharing of their experiences will be an obvious happening, unless it is a completely autocratic situation. This label of creative drama is probably due to the fact that in case of this practice the aspired lesson is pre-fixed and it is used often under the school's supervision as a "...method of teaching other subject areas..."(Landy 1982).

"The ultimate effect of drama is the arousal of a conviction about life and an attitude toward it... Through drama our whole beings are persuaded so that we are truly set free, which is ideal of culture"(Fleischman 1928)

Drama, in the sense Fleischman used it, helps to actualize one of the basic aspirations of human civilization, to be free. By knowing oneself one is one step nearer the goal.



This probably should be the diagram portraying the relationship between children and theatre, i.e. through drama and play and as a corollary comes education, in the broadest sense of the term.

Drama/Theatre has been considered quite natural and universal as a process in human society, especially amongst children and bulk of theoretical writing that has been done on this subject. The lack of a particular definition of 'children's theatre' in those writings acknowledges the fact that there are so many different ways of engaging children in the theatrical domain that it is almost impossible to formulate one single definition to encompass all of them. Children's theatre as an endeavour is still discovering itself in various niches of social existence therefore a static definition even for temporary usage would contradict the fast-changing realm of children's theatre.

If not to define, however, one needs to delineate the boundaries of children's theatre in order to understand the subject at a deeper level. My attempt of doing so has a clear purpose, i.e. instead of trying to see what children's theatre is the goal is to understand when a particular theatre practice becomes children's theatre and when does it cease to be so. Does the sheer participation of children in theatre make it children's theatre? What is and/or should be the role of the children in 'children's theatre'? What is the legacy of the term 'children's theatre'? etc would form the content of the future section.

Instead of taking a broad frame of theory and then examining it in the specific socio-cultural context, I would like here to give a brief historical account of theatre and children in theatre to trace the genesis of the term 'children's theatre' and its validity at present scenario. May be then, the specific findings can be tallied against a theoretical perspective.

Children of Theatre: a brief historical account

People of really young age have taken part in theatre for a very long time. When and how it started happening is a difficult realm to explore mainly because there is scarcity of documents which marks the beginning of children coming in theatre. Moreover, both concepts -children and theatre- have changed overtime.

Gibson had mentioned:

In a long tradition of European theatre children appeared as *putti* and the Christ Child in the Mystery Cycles, in small parts in Shakespeare's play, and in extensive roles in Marston's work for the Boy Companies at St. Pauls in London in the early seventeenth century.(Gibson 2000)

Anne Varty(Varty 2008) in her "Children and Theatre in Victorian Britain" has mentioned that "By 1887 it was estimated that during pantomime season there were some 10,000 children working in theatre all over the country"³⁷. In Britain they were paid as professionals. Mrs. Fawcett claimed that in 1887 "a child under ten earns 10s. a week. Such wages are only given to trained children; the others are paid 6d. or 7d. a night"³⁸. And if Aries is recalled – only by the end of the nineteenth century society started paying attention to the children as a separate group whose world differs from that of the adults- it cannot be possible that these children were acting in plays that addressed them and therefore there can be nothing called 'children's theatre'³⁹ in those days. Rather they were like any other play performed by the adults under a strictly professional theatre company. The appearance of the children had a spectacular effect. It was as if seeing the authentic bodies who would act without pretension, it was an extension of play.

In Victorian Britain the number of child-performer was so big and they were employed in such varied jobs that legislation had to be passed securing their rights and safety. Children were not only part of adult's theatre companies but there were Children's Companies, featuring only children (Varty 2008). The productions of narratives which addressed children- for e.g. Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll in which twelve years old Phoebe Carlo played Alice in 1886- were also in vogue. Young actors also played the roles of

³⁷'Children in Theatres', St. James's Gazette, 16 July, 1887.

³⁸Fawcett, M.G. "Holes in the Education Net". *Contemporary Review*, 51. May 1887: 644.

³⁹Aries argued that before the end of 19th century children as a separate group, having different aspirations and needs from those of the adults was not taken into consideration.

children- Kate Terry as little “Arthur”-, animals- as they were easy to be fitted in the costume-, spirits and fairies- as they had the aerial sequences and it was easy for the flexible and light weighted children to do them.

Varty had captured the ethos of the age, following Barish, which was making children participating in theatre a box office catch for many theatre companies. As she commented:

“His [the child’s] theatrical power derived precisely and paradoxically from what Jonas Barish⁴⁰ had identified as the child’s participation in a cluster of “guileless folk” cherished alike by the Romantics and Puritans for their “absolute sincerity... the peasant, the savage, the idiot, the child- those in whom the histrionic impulse remain undeveloped. The infant appears to perform without self-consciousness, making no distinction between performance and play: it seems to perform for its own pleasure rather than for an audience. This set the stage child radically apart from adult actors in an era when the cultural value of theatre was dominated by ‘antitheatrical prejudice’...”(Varty 2008)

On one hand children were the embodiment of adult fantasy, indicating the long lost innocence of humanity of the prelapsarian era, on another they are the ‘other’ and the different, though this status was denied for long, and taming them would mark the superiority of the adults who represented the ‘us’.

By the end of the century however, a huge protest was raised against employment of the children in theatre claiming that the ideal place for a child is in school and family, not the luminous and dangerous realm of stage. A huge number of devastating accidents were recorded, child actors published their autobiographies, and fictions regarding the inhuman process of training the children in theatres became public. Thus the ongoing protest found logical support. The Children’s Dangerous Performance Act of 1879 was a failure as it only focussed on the cruelty during the performance and not the rehearsal process. This made the situation even more complex and finally in 1889 the Act for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was passed which “... prohibited the theatrical employment of children under seven, and regulated that of children aged between seven and ten.”(Varty 2008)

⁴⁰ Barish, Jonas. *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*. Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1981. P.326.

In case of India⁴¹ the problem with tracing the lineage of children performing in theatre is that there is hardly any written account because the performing repertoire was mostly a lived culture, archiving of which was not felt to be a necessity by the contemporary chroniclers. Moreover, the image that crops up in mind by the term 'theatre' is not an indigenous one. In Bengal before the colonial invasion there were various art forms having theatrical elements, for instance *keertan*⁴² *kathakata*⁴³, *torja* or *kobigan*⁴⁴, *pater gaan*⁴⁵, *jatra* or *pala*⁴⁶, *swang*⁴⁷ etc. The idea of proscenium theatre was introduced by the colonial rulers and forms that defied the proscenium performance- street theatre, third theatre etc- came much later. In pre-colonial times the theatrical forms were often performed as familial vocation where the children played the children characters. Young boys used to do female impersonations. In her autobiography Binodini Dasi⁴⁸ mentioned how she entered the domain of theatre as a child actress where she, along with some other girls, had to play the role of 'Sokhi'⁴⁹. Ketaki Dutta⁵⁰ came into theatre really early with her mother, Prabha Debi, an actress, where she also had to play stock characters and small roles like that of *Malini*⁵¹, *Poricharika*⁵² etc. Theatre being an in-house business in those days had incorporated many people mostly coming from the lower rung of the society including children. Most of the actresses came to theatre at an early age like Taramoni. Theatre became for many of them an alternative to the life of poverty and inevitable prostitution⁵³.

⁴¹The case is probably same with many other Asian countries.

⁴²It was the contribution of the Vaishnavism to the music repertoire of Bengal. *Keertan* is the musical narration of different parts of the lives of Radha and Krishna.

⁴³One man narration of events, often taken from epics, religious texts or oral narrative repertoire.

⁴⁴Debate between poets in the form of poetry and song where both the parties attempt to convince the opponent the logicity of his arguments. The debate can be on any topic like men vs women, superiority of one god over another etc.

⁴⁵Narration of stories from epics, religious texts, oral narratives in the form of song with a painted scroll depicting the episodes of the story.

⁴⁶Performance in a three side open space.

⁴⁷'Jeleparar swang' was a prominent performative genre of Kolkata where the people of the lower strata used to make a procession and through song and body movement would mock and ridicule people of the upper rung. The subversive element gradually though gave way to obscene and lewd mockery as the people with power started appropriating it for their gain.

⁴⁸One of Bengal's most famous and popular actresses of the early twentieth century. Her autobiography 'Amar Kotha' (1913) traverses not just her career as an actress on stage but also encapsulates details of her private life.

⁴⁹Sokhi's are the female associates of a high-ranked lady, a queen or a princess. It was one of the stock characters of the theatrical repertoire. 'Shokhir gaan' i.e. the song of the Sokhis were often used as interludes between two intense scenes as fillers.

⁵⁰One of the finest singing actresses of Bengal stage.

⁵¹One who picks flowers from the garden and supply it to the people

⁵²Maid servant

⁵³ Though some of the actresses after having a brief career on stage went back to her prior profession which in some cases was prostitution.

What seems interesting in both these scenarios is that theatre was more of a professional endeavour where the fame came along with the paycheque though for women the salary was always meagre compared to their fame. Being a huge business theatre allowed, both in Britain and India, for people of various sorts to join the group and earn their living. There are ample references of 'freak shows' where the otherwise marginalised and stigmatized bodies were put up for a show⁵⁴. It was the 'extraordinary' open to viewing. This charm of presenting the extraordinary body on stage, as actor or as spectacle was probably one of the primary reasons that theatre opened its doors to differently skilled people. Along the line came the beautiful presentable women and highly talented children. Making a child do things on stage which it could not have been able to do otherwise was at the core of such performances. From the other end, the performers with variety of skills found a place to earn a living from in theatre.

A place like Bengal where the economy rested primarily in agricultural activities, performing for local landlords or being a touring group was in vogue as a profession. In these mobile organisation women and children also found their place. As from the beginning of the nineteenth century theatre started becoming a major entertainment of the urban rich population, both British and native *Babus*⁵⁵. Performers from the rural areas started coming to the city for living. It therefore on one hand had to offer a space for the women and on the other the women coming from the lineage of court performers, *nautch girls*⁵⁶, found a relatively modern mode of exposure of their skills of singing, dancing and acting.

It was for the theatre companies an opportunity to put the so far hidden bodies of women⁵⁷ and children on display and it was a highly profitable one. Exoticism of the unknown and untamed bodies of the 'other' posed a lucrative catch. For the women and children it was a necessity to fit into the profession because poverty was rampant, both in Britain and Bengal during the particular time which is been discussed. The power equation was therefore heavily one-sided. Supply was huge and demand could be curtailed which led to immense exploitation of the women and the children in every sense of the term. Both in England and Bengal, the noteworthy fact was that the number of girls in theatre was far greater than the

⁵⁴It could not be termed as theatre though it had theatrical elements.

⁵⁵The middle class Bengali men who emerged in the beginning of the 19th century, reaping the benefit of the colonial rule were called the *Babus*.

⁵⁶The dancing girls who used to initially entertain the native royalties and as gradually the rulers changed so did their patronage.

⁵⁷More so in case of India where public visibility of women was regarded as an indication of her loose morality and keeping the female hidden was an imperative for family honour.

boys who would be sent to factories or fields or other odd jobs while it was almost impossible for a girl to leave the realm of theatre and take up some completely different job to earn a living. In England aged actresses opened up training schools, in Bengal they ended up either being mistress of some patron, or doing menial jobs in the company or dying of starvation, repentance and oblivion.

The 'purification' of theatre started taking place through figures like Rabindranath Tagore⁵⁸, and through politicisation of the art⁵⁹. Gradually theatre entered the nooks and corners of Bengali middle class culture. In Bengali literature there are ample instances of theatrical performances put up by the youngsters of a locality during a festival⁶⁰. Those plays addressed the contemporary trend of youth culture but were not specifically aimed at the people who perform it. Plays like *Siraj-ud-Daula*, *Bonge Borgi*, *Kedar Ray* etc and adaptation of famous novels- often partial- like *Durgeshnandini*, *Kopalkundola*, etc were very popular and were performed both by adults and young people. One major trend was that the plays done in the professional stage in '*Sohor Kolikata*⁶¹' used to be performed in the suburbs. Plays were of varied subjects, mythical, patriotic, social etc. Stories of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay which were adopted on stage often had child characters, for instance, Amina in *Mohesh*, Ram in *Ramer Sumoti* etc but that was not children's theatre.

From the reluctance of the theorists and the practitioners to tag a theatre as 'children's theatre' if and when children take part in theatre proves that sheer participation of children does not make it children's theatre. Commonly held view is that children has to have some impact not because they have characters to play but at a deeper level. The presence of the children must influence the form and content of the play. The narrative has to be such that

⁵⁸Tagore's family had a history of performing plays. With Rabindranath it became more prevalent as he would write the script and songs to which his elder brother Jyotirindranath Tagore would set tune. With them it completely became an in-house performing group. Moreover, Rabindranath introduced theatre as an activity in Shantiniketan. However, his practices were very much limited to a specific group of Bengali intelligentsia and hardly had any effect on the professional theatre which was to exist for a couple of decades more before its economy and social patronage faced a jolt.

⁵⁹ Politicisation of theatre came into the forefront with the movement against Banga-bhanga i.e. the division of Bengal. But 1940's was the time when with the advent of the powerful left politics and its cultural wing IPTA transformed theatre from a mere entertainment to a tool of disseminating political ideologies.

⁶⁰ References of such performances can be found in Abanindranath Tagore's 'Gharowa', Mohonlal Gangopadhyaya's 'Dokkhiner Baranda', Leela Majumdar's 'Tong Ling', and many more writers like Moti Nandi, Sanjib Chattopadhyaya, Dulendra Bhowmik, etc.

⁶¹This means Kolkata the city. It had not been a metropolis in the beginning of 20th century as it is today but nor was it a village.

children can relate with and it has to be presented in a way that is understood by them. This statement risks being accused of generalization which is anyway not intended⁶².

Professor Nancy Swartzell of New York University had said:

[There are] two kinds of participation. One is ... of viewing plays and intellectually participating in its message. Another is as actual break in the production where the audience member [physically] influences the progression of the play.⁶³ (Landy 1982)

Taking cue from that it can be argued that children's theatre can be divided into two broad categories: first where the children participate emotionally and intellectually and second where the children participate physically, intellectually and emotionally. In case of the former therefore, the theatre is *for* the children performed by the adults and the latter is *by* the children for children and adults. The theatre *for* the children by adults can be further divided into two categories, first where the adults play their role as adults in a play where the content relates to the children – the general mode of performance by the TIE companies of England and second where the adults play as children i.e. Grips Theatre which may or may not be for children. Volkar Ludwig⁶⁴ says that in the language of North Germany 'grips' means the 'ability to understand fast'. He comments that "The realism of the children's world is unique. There can be a one-legged soldier, a speaking frog- everything is alive, lively and therefore valuable and necessary." (Chhotoder theatre- bidesh 2013) In West Bengal however, Grips theatre has meant that adults would play roles as children. Adults' playing the role of children is a strong subversion of the prevalent power dynamics and therefore this form is often used to represent critical and complex issues not related to children.

What then makes a theatre 'children's theatre'? It cannot be called so if it is just *for* the children because this '*for*' is perceived by the adults. They try to figure what is necessary *for* the children from their standpoint. In case of theatre *of* or *by* the children the direction and structuring comes from the adult(s) which influences the process and the product. However, it has also been seen by practitioners that the primary initiative has to be taken by the facilitator to start of a process. Therefore it cannot be said that if and when children will initiate a theatre process that can authentically be called 'children's theatre' because that hardly

⁶² Children of a particular socio-economic sphere might be familiar with issues unknown to many other children though they might share the same age range. It is the same regarding the formal presentation of a play.

⁶³ WCBS-TV, Sunrise Semester, "Drama in Education- Theatre in Education, Principles and Practices, (October 29, 1979).

⁶⁴ He is the initiator of the Grips theatre movement in Germany.

happens initially⁶⁵. To resolve this problem I would like to introduce Paulo Freire's idea of the 'pedagogy of the oppressed' which he termed as "... a pedagogy which must be forged *with*, not *for* [or *by* or *of*], the oppressed (be they individuals or whole people) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity."(Freire 1970). To enable the children to find and express their voice through theatre, without patronising them, can only be done if the process is conducted *with* them without any pretence to hide the lead of the facilitator. Only if the children develop a play they can rightfully claim its ownership which makes it theirs.

Plays where the adults act for the children cannot therefore be called children's theatre as during the development of the plays children play minimal roles. In case of TIE companies⁶⁶ while doing play they have lengthy interactive sessions with the children and from the insights of the children the members of the company develop a play. In this case, the children are excluded from the making of the play process, though they are consulted often, and the only contribution they make is intellectual and not physical and intellectual. In Grips theatre the relation is even distant as the adults put themselves under the grab of children as roles and not individuals.

The basic difference between the plays in which the young actors like Binodini or Taramoni acted and play like 'Halla'⁶⁷ is that in the former case the theatre used the bodies of the actors to narrate stories but in the latter case the actors chose theatre as a medium to express themselves. It is no more the use of the actors but of the medium.

When did this transformation happen? When did the agency of the performing children change? And more importantly, why? For answers to these questions looking back into the genesis and path trodden by 'children's theatre' is necessary.

Children's theatre: the genesis

If drama, as a process of play making, is agreed to be the core of theatre, that involves presenting a play for audiences, then it can be argued that every child has a natural inclination towards it through role-play, seen primarily in its formative years. How this natural attribute

⁶⁵Once the children are accustomed to the environment, comfortable around the facilitator(s) and each other they can lead the process.

⁶⁶One of the basic differences between the TIE companies of England and those that are conceptualized in India is that in the former the group consists of a actor-teacher or teacher-actor, a dramaturge and actors, all of them adults performing for the children while in the latter case the group is made of children with one or two facilitator(s).

⁶⁷This play was done by the students of 'Calcutta Rescue' a school working with Nandikar in the early 90's.

acquired a space in the sphere of theatre as an accepted medium of expression and how the transformation in conceptualising children's theatre actually occurred needs to be observed. The factors causing the change, the transformed relation of theatre with children, the aspired effects and a change in viewing the role of theatre in the larger social framework are also to be seen.

Twentieth century came with a different perspective regarding children which changed their relationship to theatre. Formal education from the onset of the new century became immensely important for the children of the developed countries. The state's transformation into Welfare states ensured mandatory minimum education for every child. Association of the children in the realm of professional theatre thus diminished. The scenario was drastically different in colonised India and especially Bengal where rampant poverty, static social stratification and continuing taboo regarding performing arts compelled both children of the performers and independent ones to take up jobs⁶⁸ in theatre. The rules and laws that the colonial rulers had passed in their native lands had hardly any effect on population of the colonised countries.

However, this idea of organised, well-structured, job-oriented, formal education faced a trauma in Europe, especially in England with the World War I. The entire system of education seemed simply redundant to many after the unprecedented destruction of the World War II. People who were the product of that education system did not only fail to resist the violence but many of them planned and instigated it- this thought took a massive toll in the heart of many, both educationists and common people. The conceptualisation of the education system and expectations from it, the way the future generation would be formed, changed drastically. For them it was not enough to prepare children for their future jobs but to train them to understand, analyse and survive in the rapidly changing world also became important. The attempt was to coach the students to "cooperate and understand the world both rationally and emotionally" which advocated the student centred education prioritizing "the child's emotional needs over mere requirement to absorb knowledge and facts."(Wooster 2007) This demand took such a monumental turn during the 1950's and 1960's that not only new attempts were taken in the field of education but new institutions and bills were also passed to make the changes durable and effective on a larger scale.

⁶⁸One must not overlook the existence of the *Nautch* girls who were initiated in this profession at a yearly age. Though their art was not theatre per se but had theatrical elements.

On the theatrical sphere, by that time some big changes also took place. Bertolt Brecht with his critique of Aristotelian theatre and theory of 'alienation' had given a major transformative thrust in the way of seeing theatre. The split between the actor and the character made it possible to show through what path an actor assumes a role, the process of being another person. It was no more an elegant performance but the projection of the process. Along came Augusto Boal for whom theatre was the "rehearsal for the revolution"(Boal 1979) where engaging the audience in the process of analysing and realising the oppressive dynamics operative in reality was given more importance owing to which the nature of the performances changed from a rigid pre-audience structured one to a flexible accommodative, open-to-rupture form. There was also a drive to 'democratize' the art, take it out from its usual setting and make it available for the access and benefit of a wider audience, make theatre relevant for all. What changed basically were the ideas regarding the role theatre is to play in society which entailed all of these transformations, ideally and structurally.

On a parallel path theatre acquired an important status in formal education which had a history of its own. Hodgson and Banham(J. Hodgson and M. Banham 1972) had argued that in 1919 when English was 'given primacy' to the curriculum of England, drama was an important part of it. By 1940s drama was acknowledged as giving an "opportunity for each child to develop to the full his mental and physical resources."(J. Hodgson and M. Banham 1972). By 1950s 'improvisation' was accepted as a major tool of drama and the role of teacher as 'encourager... provider of ideas'.(J. Hodgson and M. Banham 1972)The Ministry of Education, London, published a report in 1954 where it stated that exploration through drama is "one of the essential ways of learning enabling the children to master their own little worlds"⁶⁹. 1960s was the time of changing thoughts with youth movements, growth of liberalization, changing personal relationships due to the introduction of the Pills, abortion act, amending divorce laws etc.

In that environment of viewing the reality differently two major ideas that played seminal role in the development of a new form of theatre were- the 'centrality of the child within education' and to encourage the children to investigate and discover the world through play and active approaches. As a result what emerged was a form called Theatre-in-Education or TIE, first established in Belgrade, Coventry, England by Gordon Vallins in 1965. The job

⁶⁹ Ministry of Education, *Drama in the Schools of Wales*, London: HMSO, 1954, p. 2

was to assist the children understand the world both rationally and emotionally and drama became the primary tool.

The TIE programmes initially not only helped the children to understand the reality out there passively but through questioning it. Tony Jackson mentioned one such play piece titled “The Price of Coal” where the eighth graders went to interview the labours of a coal mine, who were at strike. The students then did a play portraying the condition of the workers, their demand of a better salary and the arguments of the owner. This play insinuated a heated discussion amongst the children which was the goal of the entire project(Jackson 1993).

Naturally then, the encouragement that TIE- and DIE⁷⁰- gave the students to think, question and challenge dragged them under suspicion and threat. In 1979 when the Conservative party came to power in Britain they hugely cut the budget for TIE thus making it almost dysfunctional. TIE teams remained producing plays as an aid to teach subjects of the rigidly structured curriculum. The National Curriculum of 1988 pulled drama and theatre under English syllabus thus forcing it to shed the radical activities and adopt a conforming garb⁷¹. The Local Management of Schools (LMS) withdrew the budgets from the Local Educational Authorities (LEAs) and gave it to the schools which chose to invest it in more “parent-sensitive” areas like on teachers and books and less in something like TIE. Mrs. Thatcher’s dictum that “there is no such thing as society, only individuals and their families”(Rutherford 1990) was symbolic of the perception of decline of any communitarian value. The state was ready to take up welfare programmes but not making groups of people independent of the state support.

The condition of Britain regarding TIE is discussed briefly so that a comparative analysis can be drawn between the situations mentioned above and that of West Bengal. The reasons behind choosing Britain are; firstly, Britain was the first of the European nations to legally accept the role of theatre in education, a pioneer, and introduce it directly to the curriculum. Secondly, the socio-economic structure that it developed for the smooth functioning of TIE was a model and thirdly, the gradual progression of the TIE companies, reaching their zenith and then gradually almost losing the validity is very prominent. Finally and most importantly, Britain and its TIE project have a huge influence on Bengal both academically and

⁷⁰ DIE was Drama in Education, the predecessor of TIE.

⁷¹Details of DIE and TIE -their genesis, development and demise- will be provided in the second chapter.

practically, so much so that the advocates of introducing theatre in school curriculum in West Bengal often draw references from the Britain TIE, to establish their points.

Children's theatre in West Bengal

In a completely different situation the notion of 'children's theatre' became relevant in West Bengal⁷². Here again there is the difficulty to discern which was the theatre by children and which was children's theatre. The oldest organisation which worked with the children was told to be 'Shishu Rangan'⁷³ a group established by Shailen Ghosh⁷⁴.

Pinaki Guha, the founder of 'Chetla Krishti Samsad' said in his interview that Ajitesh Bandopadhyay in early 80s had expressed his wish to bring children in theatre. Ajitesh had observed that there was hardly any space for the children in group theatre or non-professional theatre but the children are the ones who enjoy all sorts of live performances the most. Mr. Bandopadhyay expressed his concern regarding the future of theatre when he was thinking of associating it with the future generation of theatre practitioners. He said that people of his generation came to theatre in college life, mostly through politics. Many chose to be active in the cultural wings of political parties they support and not in some aspects of this politics they do not like. This kept them associated with the group and yet not so directly to face unwanted pressures. Cultural activities also give space to project oneself as an important part of a group. The general understanding was, because the Communist Party had set up a cultural front it must be having a "cultural taste". He concluded that because of these factors many of the people who joined theatre came without any training in the form. The trend of teaching children various art forms - music, dance, painting etc⁷⁵ - is very much in practice in Bengali culture and the desire is not always to go for degrees and certificates but to know the art thoroughly⁷⁶. So why can children not be trained in theatre? His idea of theatre was quite flexible while he mentioned that children themselves can come up with stories which they then can perform so that they as well as the audience can enjoy it. What was he actually

⁷²Though children on theatre have a long history in Bengal, by the time the discourse about 'children's theatre' started the country was divided and Bengal was broken into Bangladesh and West Bengal.

⁷³The group was established in 1970. They did their first production, a play titled *Mitul Naame Putulti* in 1972.

⁷⁴Shailen Ghosh is an eminent Bengali author. He was born in 1931 and when he was in class IX he took part in a play in school which influenced him immensely and later he started writing for children. In 1950s he was associated with CLT Abna Mahal and by the beginning of 1970s he established his own group Shishu Rangan.

⁷⁵Giving the child training of these sorts with education is till date a common phenomenon for Bengali middle class families.

⁷⁶Obviously when Mr. Bandopadhyay was having this conversation- during early 80s- the situation was quite different from today.

thinking about the making of the play, how should it be done, with or without the help/direction of the adults was not very clear from Mr. Guha's speech. Yet "enjoyment" was the marker he set to judge theatre, enjoyment in making it and showing it.

Rudraprasad Sengupta, one of the pioneers of children's theatre in West Bengal echoes his ideas. Mr. Sengupta said that the central idea of children's theatre is "joyous creation". For him the journey of making theatre is more important than the play itself. He traces the gradual development of the idea of children's theatre from the late 70s, like Ajitesh and argues that theatre by children prior to that i.e. young people performing in *para*⁷⁷, clubs and schools had a positive effect on the formation of children's theatre as a new practice. Mr. Sengupta mentioned that theatre faced a challenge during the late 70s when various other forms of entertainment became available to common people and the "pristine glorious position" of theatre was taken away. As the appeal of theatre started reducing, people who devoted fulltime to theatre realized that they have long leisure hours. Simultaneously Mr. Sengupta observed that the major theatre movements of Bengal were once introduced by a group of committed young people who gradually became the face of Bengali theatre- Shambhu Mitra, Tripti Mitra, Tapas Sen, Khaled Chowdhury, Shobha Sen, Utpal Dutt etc. But as the 'consumerist culture' became rampant, joint families broke down in the beginning of 80s; youth who used to get financial support from their families to do theatre were scarce. There was a need therefore to enliven theatre by connecting it with the young, once again. The fact that children are also young and theatre can be done with them came as an idea. Moreover, he said, there was a subtle demand amongst the people of his group to be a professional theatre worker i.e. earn their living through theatre and in that case the group had the responsibility to provide them with some money and earning money through theatre was an impossibility in those days⁷⁸. Taking projects from different agencies therefore became a necessity. Mr. Sengupta talked to the official in charge of the Youth Department of India and convinced them to fund theatre projects in schools.

The TIE companies of Great Britain had a major influence in conceptualising and figuring the activities which were thought to be done in schools of West Bengal. What was overlooked was that in England many TIE companies were funded by the state and India lacked that infrastructure and to some extent motivation. It was not possible therefore, said Mr.

⁷⁷*Para* means in Bengali a small locality.

⁷⁸The situation has not much changed even today although it is different in case of highly skilled actors like Debshankar Halder and Goutam Halder. Minerva Repertory company was established three years back where the actors were paid though the troupe is been dissolved recently.

Sengupta, to make a TIE group with a director, dramaturge, teachers and actors following the British model. On the other hand it is ideally accepted that the best teachers should teach the children, best directors and actors should be at the service of the children. Yet the best actor of a group might not choose to work with children but to make a career and be famous. S/he cannot be forced to work with children just because s/he is the best. This was the case with many actors; stated Mr. Sengupta. These two practical problems forced the creation of a new model where the children would act themselves and the trained actors would play the role of catalyst. It is important to view other's performing but to perform is more direct that enables one to have conviction of oneself.

That was the preparing phase for Nandikar, a theatre group that occupies the role of the pioneer regarding children's theatre in West Bengal. The large break came when the Ford Foundation funded a project called "In Search Of Children's Theatre" in 1989. From 1989 to 1997 they had organized workshops of 250 teachers in 80 schools. Till 1998 on an average they conducted workshops with 3840 children in 96 schools. The very aim of the programme was stated very briefly in the following way:

Its aim is to let the children initially know his milieu and eventually perceive his world through theatre, to initiate his analysis of his own milieu to sharpen his interface of the "I and the World"... And all this geared to the sheer joy of creativity...(Chanda 2008)

Nandikar worked with the Ford Foundation funding for six years (1992-1996). Through the works when the relevance of children's theatre was successfully getting established, the project ended. This was a break from the expected route and theatre in schools by Nandikar faced a rupture. Later it got another project from SIDA and worked in the Children's Voice project from the beginning of the millennium.

One, however, cannot overlook the fact that both the funding agencies of Nandikar were from broad which hints at two underlying trends: firstly, the government of India probably does not place much importance in children's theatre as necessary for the children and the groups working in this area therefore has to wait for foreign funding. Secondly, what will be the fate of these projects once these funding gets withdrawn is an issue to think about. These lines of thought indicate developing a strategy where theatre could be done with children at the lowest possible cost for which the money can be gathered through the activity itself. This will, probably, make theatre more independent and effective.

Nandikar took the pioneering role in Kolkata after which within a decade many other groups started working with children coming from various socio-economic groups. People like Subhsish Ganguly, Debshankar Halder, Sohini Sengupta, Tirthankar Chanda, Malay Mitra etc who were trained in Nandikar's in House training workshops and others like Kaushik Chattopadhyaya, Asish Das⁷⁹ etc who had a kind of internal training through theatre, took up the issue of children's theatre.

Mid90s was the time when after Nandikar pilot project children's theatre was opening up its doors for various experimentations and it gradually started flourishing not only in the metropolis but also in the suburban areas. This is not to say that there were no such practice before Nandikar's formal initiation but children's theatre was probably never-taken-so-seriously before. People with differing ideas, hopes and aims in mind and from different academic backgrounds engaged with children's theatre, a theatre that almost all of them agreed was necessary for the 'holistic development' of children.

Children's theatre in West Bengal at present is approached from different aspects. For some it forms a part of extra-curricular activity in schools, some groups organize children's theatre workshop at a regular basis, for some group the target is to come up with highly sophisticated productions, for some it is a optional training while for some it is a way of living. To understand this complex mesh an arbitrary classification is done where the groups often overlap and are not mutually exclusive just like the thoughts that drive them.

Broadly there are six major modes of engagement with children's theatre.

- Workshops –residential or non-residential- arranged by group(s) with or without collaboration of other group(s), with or without a separate funding body. E.g. Workshop organized by Gobardanga Naksha, Esho Natok Sikhi, Kolkata, Shishu Kishore Bikash Mela etc.
- Regular/ short termed workshops in schools conducted by eminent groups or theatre practitioners as extra-curricular activity or annual event. E.g. Raja Bhattacharya in South Point School Kolkata, freelance theatre workers working in many schools of the metropolis like, Vivekananda Institution, Labanhrad Vidyapith, Boluhati High School etc.

⁷⁹The names of these theatre-workers and their initiation in facilitation are mentioned here because in the next chapter some of their works would be talked about. This piece of information mentioned here would then act as a base.

- Theatre classes conducted by organizations where theatre personalities are invited to take classes. E.g. Nehru Children's Museum, Bidden Street Subham, CLT Aban Mahal etc
- Theatre groups of metropolis and/or suburb having a children's section. E.g. Sangskritik Shantipur, Sajghor, Shantipur, Pancham Vaidik, Kolkata, Nandikar, Kolkata, Ranaghat Srijak etc.
- Peoples and NGOs working with children of the slums, orphanage, stations, pavements and red light areas and employing theatre either as a tool of informal education -with which personalities like Sandip Bandopadhaya is associated- or a constructive means to bring the children back in the main stream social living. They argue theatre to have innate therapeutic features which enable the participants to cope with their traumatic experiences. Prajak, Kolkata, Calcutta Samaritan, Ranaghat Neeharika, Chetana, Hatibagan etc are organizations working in this path.
- Group of children guided and led by adults producing plays. E.g. Fulki, Sodpur, Chetla Krishti Samsad, Kolkata, Shishu Rangan, Kolkata, Jhalapala, Dumdum etc.

These various models are operative at the same time and occupy the same space. The complexity starts as and when they start sharing each other's attributes. Same theatre worker can be active as a freelancer in more than one model. New opportunity for children's theatre activists and facilitators are opening up in terms of a varied range of spaces and genres.

However, one belief is seen to be common in them- the conviction of theatre's efficacy and longevity or memory of the effect the marker of success.

The problem with such an ephemeral medium as theatre which ontologically defies any attempt of reproduction (Phelan 1993) is first to understand the nature of the efficacy and if that goal is reached through theoretical assumptions it is nearly impossible to measure it. Though there are provisions today to measure and express something as abstract and qualitative as emotion in quantitative terms it does not offer a viable solution. There is no such cognizable procedure that can trace an emotional transformation back to any particular stimulus which might have played a major catalysing role. This issue of fathoming the efficacy is problematic in different aspects.

In case of theatre where, ideally, communication should be from both ways it is difficult to discern any pattern of reception either on the part of the facilitator or participants. Postman &

Weingartner (Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner 1969) argued how no two persons learn in the same way and to complicate it further they showed how at times of imparting lessons the intention of the speaker becomes secondary to the nature of the reception. The instructions of the facilitators and the feedback of the participants becomes useless if the person in the receiving end cannot understand it and because we always understand in relation to what we already know the situation becomes highly complex.

Whatever effect theatre has on associated people, it can only be proved if there is an indication of the effect. Scholars argue that theatre makes one creative and confident but this can be dismissed by anybody if there is no proof to support it.

“There was a young girl who had not spoken for six months ... dramatising in a context where she had to help a character through a difficult situation, suddenly she spoke - she gave advice.”(Sue Jennings & Others 1994)

To notice this minute and magnum transformation the facilitator has to be very meticulous and skilled otherwise the proof just vanishes into oblivion.

Moreover, there is the theoretical pressure on the facilitators. Those who enters the practicality of children's theatre after a thorough academic training, often shows the tendency of seeing instances which theories would proclaim. One of the problem with passion is it overtly glorifies elements which would have done better with some scepticism because we often see what we want to see (Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner 1969). The other lot who does not have a theoretical understanding take time to be trained through the process to realize what to be noticed and how these noticed factors should be tackled.

Another persisting problem with delineating the efficacy of theatre on children is that it seldom attempts to theorize from the children's point of view. The common answer to the often asked question “Why do you do theatre?” to child meets the answer which is innocent and abstract “I do theatre because I love it.” Loving is probably a reason enough for a child to be engaged with any activity. It may seem to be an absurd emotion for a researcher as love is not rational enough to be theorized. Most of the time therefore either a sceptical theorisation takes place analysing and thus trying to break down the entire process into its component parts and make an effort to find the source of the love or an impulsive patronising mission culminates in casual indifference and theorising from top down. The suggestion is not to abandon any of these paths but to make a combination of both. Theorizing is necessary but

without losing an eye for the specific and apparently irrational. Friendship, togetherness, mutual trust, appreciation of creative faculty; factors one expect from theatre together form the cause of a child's loving theatre and they should therefore be dealt with a holistic view. To get this view the researcher has to be present throughout the process because nobody can predict when and how a shy child would open up or a hostile child would share a story. Instead of trying to draw theoretical threads from a performance piece or structure the workshop according to theoretical observations, it would be more useful probably if one follows the workshop process completely and then try to tally it with the available theories which may come from different areas like sociology, psychology, theatre studies, education theories etc. This method would not only enable one to see how far the theories are viable but also where they fall short and then try to create a new one for that.

Moreover, if the process of theatre is agreed to be more important than the product then what more can be expected from it than offering a space where one feels safe to express, secured to challenge, free to dissent, recommended to empathise and encouraged to be happy with others. The process itself speaks for its efficacy, if long term effects like being creative, cooperative, confident etc are achieved they can be analysed later. This is not to imply that the attributes mentioned later are not be aspired for but to suggest that what is available immediately should not be overlooked for larger indications. If a theatre workshop attempts to enhance all the elements that can be viewed like joyous participation, energy, mutual collaboration etc in long run the bigger goals will be achieved automatically.

What is this bigger goal? To make a child confident, cooperative, creative, empathetic etc are the avowed goal of theatre but this is just another step in the path of a destination which often gets hidden by the shadowy turns in the way.

In 'The Good Person of Szechwan' Brecht made Sentei ask the gods if the entire world is polluted how can a pure soul survive? Taking the logical thread from there one might ask what role are the humane values like love, cooperation, empathy, creativity etc going to play in a gradually dehumanising world? Is then aspiring for these attributes a preparation for a better world? Is then the ultimate goal of theatre not to instil the values but also to create an existence where these can be appreciated?

The answer is probably positive.

The Search

This research projects rests on the belief that imparting community ethos lies at the core of theatre and that is the ultimate destination theatre should aspire to achieve.

It is necessary to clarify one crucial thing here. It is obvious for theatre to cause the birth of a collectivity. Unlike any other art form theatre necessitates co-presence of at least two human beings, an actor and a spectator, between whom a relationship can be established through theatre. This collaboration is temporary like most other collaborations, but that is not what I mean here by community ethos. Benedict Anderson had to argue regarding the nature of nation that “it is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human being, has finite, if elastic, boundaries beyond which lie other nations.”(Anderson 1983) It can be applied in case of any community as an idea as well⁸⁰. Theatre, however, might and should aspire for creating community whose allegiance only lies in the freedom of expression, creative analysis of one’s time and creative appreciation of the art, not to a specific national or regional boundary. This community cannot be built if it is located in a particular place and from there it preaches the necessity of a creative community rather it is only possible when it is mobile and can address specific geo-temporal issues towards the larger goal of instilling community ethos. It is only possible for human beings to be the mobile carriers of an idea and active agents to spread it. If theatre can create within the people the conviction in community living without hiding its disadvantages and can enable them to strategise against possible challenges when necessary only then this community is possible. If every person carries in her the ethos of togetherness and an un-daunting faith in the superiority of collective living and is able to advocate it both logically and emotionally this goal can be achieved. The goal of building a mobile community with almost no boundaries can be done by preparing its components, i.e. the people, interact with them for the possible ways and hope that the destination will be reached. Pathik Basu said:

⁸⁰Primarily because we are still living in the time where in common understanding nation is the biggest community and other larger ideas like the ‘downtrodden’, the human race that cuts across the boundaries of nation are till to find its appeal.

সম্ভব তখন সম্ভব যখন সম্ভব ব্যক্তির ব্যক্তি থেকে ব্যক্তিতে উপনীত হয়, হতে চায়।... নাহলে সম্ভব হবে একজন নেতা ও তাকে আবর্তন করে নানা স্বার্থ উপস্বার্থহাসিল করতে চাওয়া গুণ্ডা, ধূর্তক্যাডারের পাল। (Basu 2008)⁸¹

Therefore it is essential that the basic component, the human beings, is well prepared. In the age of virtual reality this notion should not be difficult to grasp, a diffused togetherness where individual is the smallest unit but the existence of that individual is futile if not connected to a network, a collective and vice versa.

Society is always changing therefore it can be said that there is nothing new in change but Postman & Weingartner had something different to say, "... change isn't new; what is new is the *degree of change*... [there occurred] a qualitative difference in the character of change. Change changed." (Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner 1969) Both quantitative and qualitative change forced people to be in an anomic situation from where they would have regained stability but this time they failed as their losing a sense of 'belonging' entailed unimaginable profit for a few.

Touraine commented through his concept of "desocialization":

"... the more economic exchanges become worldwide, out of reach of political and social controls, and thus become desocialized, the deeper becomes the separation between... economic and technological ability... and self-identity...our identity is increasingly detached from what we do and more and more dependent on what we are... by our ascribed status, our age, sex, our cultural heritage and choices."(Touraine 1998)

The desperate drive to find one's identity gives way to identity politics which leads to the violent confrontation between differences overlooking the similarities along with the disparities. Any sort of violence, on one self or another indicates the breaking down of all forms of communication and therefore complete ignorance and indifference to the "other". The 'communication revolution' is said to be one of the major cause of this disruption because it allows communication among few at the expense of non-communication amongst the most. For the reason that most of the people cannot take part in this process they are barred from knowing what is going on in reality though they are affected by it. Information is

⁸¹"A Collectivity is only possible when its members wish to and can be a personality and not a mere person. Otherwise a collectivity would be of a leader and around her/him a number of cunning goons and cadres willing to fulfill their vested interests."

disseminated to a degree that imparts that "... behind the reality perceived by the senses [by common people] there is a vast reality that escapes the imagination that can only be expressed by mechanical formulae... A world that can only be understood by scientists [read specialists] is a world from which they [the people] are alienated." (Fischer 1959) This alienation leads to the major problems of the present time the "who-am-I" problem and the "what-does-all this-mean" problem. (Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner 1969) And "[a] man who does not belong to any society loses all identity, becomes a reptile crawling between nothing and nothing. Thus, reality is made unreal, and man inhuman." A man thus being alienated from the reality and himself "...becomes conscious himself as a fetish, a mask... the 'fetish like character of the commodity'... has transferred itself to man and has completely taken possession of him."(Fischer 1959)And when a man is a commodity he is available in the market.

In this situation it is necessary to inculcate a sense of belonging to save whatever is humane from the dehumanizing forces of market, economy, and profit. Each individual is insecure in their own cocoon. Until and unless this feeling of insecurity is realized to be a common one and not a unique instance, struggle against all the factors causing this cannot be waged and for this communication is necessary.

What will then the community be like? Ideally it should be a collaboration of people having close ties and warmth amongst themselves but without anybody attempting to dominate the other. Petra Kuppers and Gwen Robertson had quoted Victor Turner saying that "communitas" forms the core of a community which is "limit experience: as a state of being with others that transcends difference"(Petra Kuppers & Gwen Robertson 2007) and this similarity plays the major role in uniting them. This requisite of being similar gradually transforms into a coercive force demanding subjugation and negation of all differences. This is the nature of the classical model of society that produces individuals who are "similar but unequal"⁸². The problem with this similarity is that it is judged either by ascribed attributes as race, sex, ethnicity, etc which are more or less permanent or achieved attributes as class which is prone to change⁸³. The complication gets diminished if the similarity is searched not in them but in a group of factors that is a mixture of them, they are as basic as ascribed ones but can be achieved, attributes like mutual cooperation, acknowledging and respecting the

⁸² Alain Touraine. www.aaaaag.orghttp://www.mediafire.com/?zmlmzxejmy

⁸³The desire to maintain one's status creates pressure.

'different', patience, humility etc. They are no doubt abstract ideas but also the only ones that can save the humanity from indifferent mechanisation.

"We are all equal" said Touraine "Because we all want to be different." (Touraine 1998) Knowing this wish to be different which actually the similarity is, can only happen if communication between individuals is possible and Freire says this communication has to be dialogic as only through dialogic communication the interacting parties can grasp the position of the other. Communication by nature necessitates dialogue where all the participating agents should share actively and is not only passively shared with and dialogue is "more than talk" between people ⁸⁴(Edmiston 2000), it is a democratic way that "is open-ended... resists closure and thus ultimately resists domination" as said Gerard Delanty, quoting Habermas.(Delanty 2007)

Whether theatre deserves to be burdened with this responsibility of disseminating faith in collective living can be posed as a question. An answer of which can be found quite clearly in Ernst Fischer's "Necessity of Art" where he analyses the role that art is supposed to play.

... [A]rt in its origin was magic, a magic aid towards mastering a real but unexplored world. Religion, science, and art were combined in a latent form... in magic... Either of the two elements of art may predominate at a particular time, depending on the stage of society reached – sometimes the magically suggestive, at other times the rational and enlightening; ... But whether art soothes or awakens, casts shadows or brings light, it is never really a clinical description of reality.... True as it is that the essential function of art for a class destined to change the world is not that of *making magic* but of *enlightening* and *stimulating action* it is equally true that a magical residue in art cannot be entirely eliminated, for without that minute residue of its original nature, art ceases to be art.

Art is necessary in order that man should be able to recognize and change the world. But art is also necessary by virtue of the magic inherent in it. (Fischer 1959)

⁸⁴ Edmiston, B. "More than Talk: a Bakhtinian Perspective on drama in education and change in understanding", *NADIE Journal*18, 1994: 25-36.

It has residues of magic therefore it can aim for goals which apparently might seem impossible. A human being wants to be more than oneself, it wants to relate and be related with other entities to have a 'whole' existence, to be able to 'make sense' of the world that flows beyond its body. Fullness can be attained not only through experiencing but sharing it with others and thus being able to grasp realities that a person would have not been able to know otherwise (Basu 2008).

At the dawn of civilization the homo sapience learnt to use tools which made all the seeing impossibilities, possible. Language was one such tool which was more for communication than for expression which was the first step of art. Art was never, said Fischer, an individual activity but a social creation. The function of the individual artist, the sorcerer, the medical man was to voice the common condition and not to stand as an individual. The alienation, mechanisation, dehumanisation, all that the human civilization has come through makes the job of the artist more critical to speak for the people and crucial because in the face of fragmentation the artistic agency may re-establish togetherness. Art has to shape this togetherness over the altruistic community where individuals are not to be submerged to the collectivity but to stand as individuals with the collectivity.

What theatre cannot do alone is to bring the transformation but what it can do is to initiate the process by inculcating a faith that an alternative of the degenerating human condition is possible. Theatre allows space for imagination, limitless possibilities. The borders which are set as the markers of real, possible, achievable are strengthened more and more by cultivated 'fear, selfishness [and]... lack of imagination.' (Prentki 2009) The foundation of the transformation is the duty of an art because though it reflects the time "[a] work of art has value only if tremors from the future run through it" says Andre Breton. The core logic is "[e]very art contributes to the greatest art of all, the art of living."⁸⁵ (Prentki 2003)

Children today will be adults of tomorrow and it is better that from childhood they adopt the community ethos to implement the belief in their lives. Theatre can, so say the scholars instil those basic features -knowing oneself, taking responsibility, showing empathy, creativity, understanding, cooperation, creative agency- amongst the practitioners which are not only the pre-requisites of believing in a community ethos but also of being a successful bearer of the faith. Searching for how can and should the process of theatre be conducted to engrave the

⁸⁵ Willett, J. (ed.), Brecht on Theatre, London: Methuen, 1986

features in the minds of the children and enable them not only to bear it but to be able to critique and mould it as per necessity without losing its humanitarian zeal is the primary agenda of this research.

Although...

This research is based on the hope that through theatre and especially thorough children's theatre the community ethos can be instilled. However, this idealism poses a critical threat to the entire endeavour of theatre, especially children's theatre. If, for the sake of argument it is accepted that indeed through theatre community feelings can be articulated then theatre is to be viewed against the global drive of individuation, 'development', progress centering on the only unit that consumerism can appeal to, the individual. On the other hand, in the face of massive scale of violence what role theatre can or more importantly should play is a vital question today. If theatre teaches a lifestyle of togetherness then how will a child adjust and survive in a completely hostile situation beyond the workshop space where ideals like cooperation, empathy, trust etc are not only almost dysfunctional but might drag the child into danger. James Thompson had doubted quite clearly whether theatre can play any part in ensuring survival of the participants living in conflict zones, facing violence on a daily basis. If it cannot then the entire project is futile and nothing but the luxury of a few at the expense of the many. But if it can equip the participants with survival strategies then how does it do so has to be analysed.

Creating a utopic dreamland situation, safe and full of possibilities but far from the daily realities of living is not what theatre aspires for because this spell does not last long and once it's over the participants find themselves in the brutal world for which they are not prepared. "It would not be wise to send a child innocent into the big world; and talking is of poor avail. But it is possible to hold rehearsals, and try out strength in a make-believe big world"(Cook 1919) and theatre is functional as far as it prepares for the reality and does not claim to be an alternative, escaping reality itself.

Theatre, as a process oriented activity must therefore be a preparing ground, borrowing rules from the real world and experimenting with the rules but never losing a sight of the reality. In such a backdrop I would like to spell out the objective of this research once again and this time mentioning complex additions. Can theatre instil a community ethos which will be mobile and inclusive of differences without overlooking the world wide drive of segregation and individuation and aspires to transform it in favour of togetherness as an idea?

The research marks the journey where the destination is thought of but the path is unknown.
This is perhaps the narrative of all true journeys.

উদ্দেশ্যটা জানি শুধু আমি, পথ তো জানে না কেউ।⁸⁶

⁸⁶This line literally means “I just know the destination, nobody knows the path.” This is a dialogue from a play done in the workshop which will be dealt as the case study.

Chapter 2

UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT PRACTICES: AN ANALYSIS

At present, children's theatre is a well known genre of theatre practice in West Bengal. It is not only limited in the metropolis and suburban towns but have also penetrated into the rural areas. Frequent workshops in different parts of the states- metropolis, suburban towns and interior villages- is providing opportunity for children to be a part of this creative endeavour.

The children's theatre scenario was quite different even a decade ago. Except for a couple of groups working with children in the suburban areas and in the metropolis there were not so many organisations working with children at so many levels. Children's theatre practice was never a homogeneous domain but the variety was not so prominent before.

As stated before Bengal had the tradition of children performing in theatre- as professional or amateur- as a part of theatre groups. There was no theatrical practice that focused solely on the children, their ideas, expressions, emotions. The reason behind the absence of this child-centred mode of theatre is that a particular pattern of practice in the sphere of art has to have a logical, rational and ideological basis. It simply cannot arrive from nowhere. It has often been the case that a practice emerged first and theorized later. Even in that case during the theorization and analysis scholars have seen that seeds of that particular practice laid latent in the social existence whose potential was not realized properly before they caused the genesis of the practice.

In the post World War II Europe, especially England, a transformation regarding the nature of education took place. The target population was mainly the children and it was necessary to perceive them in a different way. How can their creative and rational abilities be enhanced? How can they be made into responsible citizens? What possible avenues should be explored to ensure the instilling and sustenance of humane values in the children? These questions arrived in the realm of cultural, social, educational reformations and debates regarding state policies. The trauma of the world war and the failure of the human race to prevent the destruction was the primary cause triggering this urge for change.

“Peter Slade, a gentleman with a mind of flexible steel, was encouraging children to express themselves through drama but his message to adults- parents and teachers- was that they should listen to their children. We adults, he said, usually spoil our children's absorption in their tasks and deny their creativity by our attempts to control their actions. ‘Listen to children!’ It was a radical message in the 1960's.” (Chanda 2008, cited)

It was necessary as the first step to know what the children want and not impose the ideas of the adults on them.

The movement that Slade started was joined with other transformations happening in the sphere of theatre and education- Brecht's dissection of the role of theatre, Paulo Freire's discourse on the pedagogy of the oppressed, followed by Augusto Boal which propounded viewing of any discourse from the point of view of the oppressed, a bottom-up vision instead of a top-down one. Politicisation of theatre that occurred over a period of time in Europe caused the development of children's theatre as a corollary to child-centred education system. The emergence of DIE and TIE embodied the ethos of these practices. They reached their zenith in late 60's and early 70's only to gradually die down under the indifferent domination of the conservative politics that came to power in 1979.

These transformations in England had profound influence on its former colony both theoretically and practically. Traditional art forms of India those have theatrical elements in them⁸⁷ have always been used to spread messages, ideas, through stories, songs, gestures. This feature was magnified when these arts were politicised i.e. aimed at transiting messages with a particular ideology and intention working behind them. For instance *jatras* of Mukunda Das, a Bengali singer and composer was a huge success in spreading anti-colonial fervour. Early 20th century saw adoption of different art forms to induce anti-colonial struggle. Later, the large scale politicisation of theatre that happened in Bengal in the early 40's experienced the potential of this art form in spreading messages once again. On the other side the professional theatre was giving way to group theatre where the driving force was not providing jobs or making profit but share an ideology. All these factors together paved the way for the children's theatre to originate.

The first children's theatre group of West Bengal was Shishu Rangan established by eminent writer Shailen Ghosh in 1970. Children's Little Theatre, commonly called CLT Aban Mahal was established before that, where theatre was taught to children along with dance and music. This was however, more like a school with scheduled classes. Shailen Ghosh was a part of it before establishing Shishu Rangan. 1970's onwards certain groups in Kolkata and adjacent areas were found to be working with children. Chelita Krishti Samsad, Shantipur Sanskritik, Ranaghat Rupokar etc were to name a few.

⁸⁷ 'Proscenium theatre' which is the broadest branch of theatre practice was a colonial import in India.

The major break in the realm of children's theatre in West Bengal came with Nandikar, a famous theatre group of West Bengal and India, taking up the practice in early 80's and by the end of the decade acquired a grant from the Ford Foundation. 1989. This in a sense marks the major turn children's theatre took in West Bengal.

The 90's was the period where innumerable theatre groups working with children frequented the map of West Bengal. They approached theatre in different ways and were trying to give it a shape. Plays were been built on complex issues like child labour, pressure of education on children, childhood's dream of escaping from the coarse reality etc. This was the decade of groups experimenting with the form because there was no established standard. Another important feature to note here is that by the end of the 90's many theatre groups vanished from the arena of children's theatre. Being able to do something good for the children is a morally sanctioned and appreciated activity. This is however, not enough of a force that can sustain the practice. Once the initial enthusiasm is over it becomes a compulsion to end the activities. Many people who started doing children's theatre in the 90's realized later that their expertise and interest lie somewhere else which made them leave the field. However, by the beginning of the millennium a group of people were convinced that children's theatre is a practice that they want to be engaged with and they gradually acquired a stable mode of the exercise.

The number of children's theatre practitioners is unfortunately very limited in West Bengal even today. Skilled facilitators who not only understand the technicalities of the practice but also its emotional impact, the underlying ideological and political currents form a small group, though not a homogeneous one. It is disturbing to see that due to the lack of able facilitators either skilled ones are overburdened with workshops and/or seminars or less skilled ones are entrusted with the wellbeing of the most sensitive portion of the population of a nation, the children. This situation demands a closer scrutiny of the practices that are clubbed under the title of children's theatre in the research area.

There are several organisations at present in West Bengal working with children's theatre. Important is to see who are the facilitators? How are they trained? It is being accepted by the educationists that the best teachers should be given the responsibility of teaching the children. The formative years which will provide the basis of lifetime process of learning should be done under the guidance of the most competent people. Ideally this should be applied in case of children's theatre as well because this particular art form attempts to engage not only

rational and intellectual faculty of a child but also its emotional faculty. It is not enough therefore to know the technicalities of making theatre. One must internalize them so well that s/he would be able to mould it, create new techniques out of it when necessary and do all these keeping in mind that the structure of play making is open to change if the children demand so. Being a child-centred field it must give primacy to the necessities of the children and not the available ready-made structure in hand. Are the facilitators who are engaged with children's theatre at present skilled enough to do the work? The problem is there is no marker of this skill. No amount of degrees in theatre or performance studies, from the best possible institute can guarantee that. How then will these facilitators be evaluated? Observing the facilitator working with the children is a way to do that. The best way to fathom the skill of a facilitator is to talk to the children who have been working with her/him. This one better than the first one because the observer being an adult her/himself may overlook certain minute details which can have immense impact on the children. For instance a question like "why are you late?" may apparently seem insignificant to the researcher but for a child who leaves in the pavement, earns money by picking plastics from the road and selling them, coming on time is not always possible. Moreover, if that child refuses to answer the silence may imply both an inferiority complex and a resistance to the dogmatic questioning of the facilitator in front of other children.

The problem with this is it is difficult to meet the children collectively beyond the workshop-space. Individual interviewing of the children is time consuming and more importantly children tend to respond more freely when they are in a group.

Another query that emerges in this context is where are these facilitators working with the children i.e. under what circumstances are these being done? Organisational and conceptual frameworks are several in numbers in this field⁸⁸ and according to these variations the process of doing theatre also changes markedly. For instance a temporary theatre workshop organized by a group will be different at many levels from the dramatics classes in a school. The participants and facilitators may remain the same but the different frameworks cause certain changes.

Most important question that one needs to ask is that why is a person engaged in children's theatre? What ideas and goals s/he has in mind while doing children's theatre? It is naive to assume that all of them have the development of the children in mind. A theatre worker who

⁸⁸ Two major modes will be dealt later in the chapter.

is associated with this field for more than a decade and at present is in charge of the dramatics classes of a posh school of Kolkata was asked why he does children's theatre. To the surprise of the interviewee he answered "আমি ছোটদের নাটক করি কারণ এই কাজটাই আমি পারি।"⁸⁹. This statement is problematic at two levels, excluding the fact that it is overtly practical and does not have any ideological tone. Firstly, who decides who can do children's theatre? Making the children utter the lines of the script and walk around the performance space is not children's theatre. Rather this form ideally should stand strongly against such practices. Secondly, children's theatre cannot be treated like any other job because it is an art form which demands a tint of 'magic'-as Fischer says. Magic cannot originate out of repetitive mechanical practices. Children's theatre has to deal with delicate subjects and not quantitative data which are passively open to manipulation.

Shubhasis Ganguly had joined Nandikar in late 80's. He excelled in working with the students of Calcutta Blind School, Behala. He commented in a satirical tone about the mushrooming of the groups doing children's theatre, "আসল কথাটা হল, বাংলা থিয়েটার এখন বাচ্চা খাচ্ছে।"⁹⁰ This insight coming from an experienced facilitator like him is alarming and rather disheartening. Children's theatre as a business is actually a profitable one, it seems.

In an informal interview one of the pioneers of children's theatre in West Bengal advocated for the inclusion of theatre in school curriculum saying that people engaged in theatre will then get career opportunities. Now there is no denial that in the current scenario most of the theatre workers cannot earn their livelihood from theatre. They have to look for other career options which affect their theatre practice. Even in that situation incorporating theatre in school curriculum to provide job opportunities cannot be justified as one of the accepted reasons. If this factor becomes one of the stated justifications of incorporating theatre in school curriculum then the children and their needs will no longer be at the centre and the theatre will be dealt with like any other subject taught in schools. There are ample examples how a project started with grand ideas and in no time got transformed into a money making career opportunity. A balance between the ideals of children's theatre and the meeting the practical demands of the job market can be accepted but not the dominance of the latter over the former. Tirthankar Chanda, one of the prominent children's theatre workers of West Bengal, had once asked one of his friends who was an official in the 'Children's Welfare'

⁸⁹ "I do children's theatre because I can to it."

⁹⁰ This means children's theatre is a catch word today, used for various reasons.

department how is the welfare of the children going. He answered to the question by saying “Welfare or no welfare, I am getting my salary.” (Chanda 2008) Unfortunately there are numeral such examples of apathy.

This chapter would try to give a sense of the children’s theatre scenario in the proposed research area in terms of its structural varieties. In doing so it would also try to look for the potentiality of these processes to inculcating faith in community living. As stated in the previous chapter, an endeavour like children’s theatre that ideally avows to bestow its participants with the humane values of creation and cooperation should aim for nothing less than that. If the freedom of emotion and expression is truly to be exercised then the reality that human beings live in needs to change and theatre as an art form can initiate the change by simply stating that an alternative is possible. A community of able people who individually carry in them the ethos of collective living is an imperative for this transformation. How far the mainstream theatre making processes with the children can ensure this, will be seen in this chapter and the relevance of the processes would be analysed accordingly.

After asking questions regarding the facilitators, their training, ideas, reason it is necessary to focus on the children now who should constitute the core of the practice of children’s theatre. Firstly it is necessary to see who are these children getting the chance to do theatre? Only then the processes that engage them in this field can be discussed.

Classifying the Children

If we consider 80’s to be the time when children’s theatre appeared in the domain of theatre in West Bengal then it has to be said that from the beginning it approached children of different socio-economic backgrounds. The pioneer project in this field i.e. Nandikar’s ‘In Search of Children’s Theatre’⁹¹ paved the way by working in schools for the street children and slum dwellers. Two schools under this project were Patipukur High School, Laketown and Calcutta Rescue Bidden Street⁹², Dumdum where the students are mostly from refugee families, who came to the country due to the Partition⁹³. Another area where the project was working with the children was Nibedita Colony, Patipukur, a slum also mostly inhabited by the Partition refugees from Bangladesh. Prior to that the group was working with the students

⁹¹ This was funded by the Ford Foundation.

⁹² Both these schools were for slum and street children.

⁹³ Before granting independence to India, the British rulers trifurcated the country. Thus India, Bangladesh and Pakistan were formed. This led to mass migration

and teachers of the elite schools of Kolkata and suburban areas like Bullygung Multipurpose, Labanhrad Vidyapith, Saltlake, Barrackpore Girls' High School, Shyamnagar Girls High School, Prafulla Sen Girls' High School, Naihati, Khantura High School etc. Institution like Calcutta Blind School was also included where Swatilekha Sengupta⁹⁴ and Shubbasis Ganguly worked with the students. Fortunately therefore it can be said that children's theatre practice was not restricted for any particular group of children⁹⁵.

The children who are at present engaged with theatre and theatrical activities⁹⁶ in West Bengal constitute such a heterogeneous group that the prevalent classifying markers like economic background, locality, education, etc seem quite blurred. Instead of wasting much attention about how can they be rightfully classified, a qualitative classification is done on the basis of the different approaches theatre takes while dealing with them. According to that two categories could be made: "Our Children" and "Their Children." Before elaborating what these two terms imply in the context of this research it is necessary to mention that these groups share many common grounds because of their co-existence in the same geo-temporal location. They are not mutually exclusive entities because they can only exist in relation to the other. Charlie Cooper quotes Deborah Eade saying "[C]ommunity is defined as much by Them as Us... Tester... goes as far as to say that: 'it is precisely the identification of ... 'them' which makes 'us' possible.' " (Cooper 2008). This is applicable to every social group which is constituted on the basis of a shared commonality of its members or at least claims to be so. Therefore the categories mentioned are relationally co-existent and one cannot be understood separately, taken out of this relational framework. It will be difficult if not impossible to define these categories in absolute terms simply because they do not exist that way.

It must be accepted here that the existing theoretical discourses on children's theatre, mostly coming from abroad⁹⁷, cannot be applied in this situation fully because the classification is made on the basis of the approach theatre takes in the proposed research area while working with the children. From the researcher's position the children consisting the 'their children' would be those who stay in the slums, pavements, stations, red light areas and rural areas. These children are so varied in terms of their lifestyle, beliefs, conducts etc that the most prominent commonality used in this research is that their experiences are not shared by the

⁹⁴ She is one of the finest actresses of West Bengal at present. She works with Nandikar.

⁹⁵ The job of facilitation though is still restricted mostly to the middle class theatre practitioners. The problem arising from this will be discussed later in the chapter.

⁹⁶ Many organisations use theatrical tools to various goals and not only play making.

⁹⁷ India, nationally or regionally is yet to establish any theoretical body which is developed considering the indigenous theatre scenario.

researcher of this project, to a large extent. Instead of overlooking that fact then it would be ethical to accept that the avenues that the researcher was able to avail regarding the experiences of these children in the domain of theatre is firstly, the accounts of the other researchers and facilitators who are working with these kids and secondly, very few occasions in different workshop spaces, where the researcher could manage to talk to these children personally. These two are not enough to bestow the researcher with an authoritative stand rather they allow glimpses of the reality absorbed through experience by the researcher.

The flexible term “our children”/ “their children” is used as ideas in this research project in order to counter the practice of rigidly classifying the children and denying the fact that understanding these positions are relational. However, due to the fact that most of the facilitators come from a middle class educated background, like the researcher of this project, for them the ‘their children’ is always constituted by the children of the slums, pavements, streets, platforms. Thus it almost becomes a rigid group. Very few of these children can continue theatre when they grow up therefore number of facilitators coming from these children is very small. Hence the term ‘their children’ is used from now on to indicate the children living in the streets and stations to be true to the real situation. Yet by not calling them ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘underdeveloped’ the hope of hearing their voice is preserved.

Question can be raised at this stage that those who constitute the ‘their children’ for the researcher grossly fall under the category commonly termed as ‘underprivileged’, ‘underdeveloped’, ‘backward’, ‘deprived’ etc. These are relational terms too coexisting with their counterparts. So why are these not chosen? The answer would be, because they are not only relational but derivative terms. Underdevelopment is judged according to a pre-determined notion of development. So is underprivileged. Deprived means that there is a standard level of achievements and facilities getting less than which makes one deprived. These terms do not pose any question to these standards, when are they formed, who sanctioned them and why are they the standard ones. Human existence is different from that of other animals because the former has certain social requirements to be human and meeting the biological needs are not enough for them. Moreover, as if “উন্নয়নও একটা বাইনারি ব্যাপার। উন্নত-অনুন্নত। তার মানে অনুন্নত যখন উন্নত হতেই হবে। কথাটা মেনে নেয়ার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে একটা পছন্দের ব্যাপার যেন এসে যায়।... হয় অনুন্নত থাকো নয় উন্নত হও।”⁹⁸ (Das 2008) Even the in-between state i.e.

⁹⁸ “Development is a binary event. Developed- undeveloped. That means one has to be developed if /she is not so already. By accepting this fact as if a choice factor comes in ... Either remain undeveloped or be developed.”

‘developing’- a term used for many of the former colonies to indicate their advancement along the lines showed by their erstwhile masters- reaffirms this binary. More importantly, two sides of this spectrum are not balanced properly. Practically one would choose to be developed and not underdeveloped which means rationally and morally the former is more advantaged, superior than the latter. This choice without considering the nature of the development, who is it for, where and when can it be applied, what is the cost of it etc is a dangerous one⁹⁹. If the binary itself is biased then the apparent option of choice is just a hoax.

In order to avoid that and adopt a more equalizing approach instead of using terms like underprivileged or such others to indicate those children, “আমরা বরং এদের নাম দিই- অন্যশিশু। যাদের কথা ভেবে বই লেখা হয়, যাদের জন্যে নাটক করা হয়, এরা তাদের দলে নেই। খাবারদাবার আর বেবিফুডের বিজ্ঞাপনে যাদের ছবি থাকে- এরা তারা নয়। অন্যশিশু- আমাদের পরিবার-পরিজনের জগতের যে শিশুরা, অদের থেকে আলাদা অন্য এক জগতের শিশু।”¹⁰⁰ (Bandopadhyay 1999) This term, the ‘other children’ is more democratic because it does not privilege any group and leaves room for flexibility. The ‘other’ is determined by the position of the observer and not any pre-conceived attribute. A child from the affluent urban educated family and a poor¹⁰¹ illiterate orphan of rural area can equally claim the authority over the term to indicate the other.

Written a decade back, however, the observation that Bandopadhyay made needs certain modifications. Today books are written; plays are made for these ‘other children’. They also appear in the advertisements. The basic difference is that their images do not serve the same purpose as those of ‘normal children’. They, clubbed under the ‘underprivileged’ tag affirm the claims that the ‘privileged’ makes¹⁰².

The cue how the approach of theatre changes in case of these two categories of children can be picked up from here. The target that any art practice aspires to achieve is always multilayered. In case of theatre it is more so because the products of this art are ephemeral¹⁰³

⁹⁹ The massive worldwide destruction of natural and human resources in the name of one-dimensional ‘development’ proves this.

¹⁰⁰ “Let us name them- the other children. They do not belong to the groups from who books are written, plays are done. They are not those kids who are visible in the advertisements of baby-food and other edibles. The other children- inhabitants of a different world form that of the children who are our family and relatives.”

¹⁰¹ Here I used the term to mean economic poverty.

¹⁰² Some recent advertisements of health drinks and other such products show these children and appeal to the viewers to buy their product more so that a percentage of their profit money can be sent for the development of these ‘poor’ children.

¹⁰³ By this I mean performance production, not the play text or directors or technicians note because all these are the parts of the entire process and not the end result.

and the primary tool of the art, the body and mind of the practitioner cannot be separated from the artist, the practitioner her/himself.

Theatre workshops are conducted to train people in the art and/or do a production, and/or do the shows of the production, and /or make it a part of the repertoire of a group and/or get a grant from funding bodies etc. Theatre classes are done in formal school or beyond¹⁰⁴ to nourish the creative faculty of the students and/or enhance the extracurricular activities of the students and/or increase the status of the schools and/or give students another option to attain more grade points and/or allow space to certain government projects etc. Theatre groups work with children because they believe in the ideals of children's theatre, and/or they have acquired skills in doing that and/or they got some funding for this work etc. These are some of the options often existing together in a particular setting. They operate at different levels of perceptibility.

One feature that cuts across these different settings is what the facilitator(s) think to be the primary goal of any theatre process. This almost fully gets determined by the factor if the participating children constitute the 'our children' group for the facilitator(s) or do they belong to 'their children' group. Due to the fact that the facilitators of West Bengal come from a small homogeneous group with urban or suburban middle class educated background children sharing these features become their "our children" and the rest obviously form "their children" which includes children from slums, streets, stations and distant geographic areas. This is not to imply that they are less serious or less empathetic to the latter group rather most of them believe that they deserve the scope in theatre more than the former one and they invest more while working with these children.

The subtle problem which has immense impact the process of doing theatre with the children is not at the level of intention of the facilitators but their idea of the 'standard' and 'ideal'. "Our children"¹⁰⁵ has or are assumed to have certain skills and information owing to their 'cultural capital', skills that are respected by the society. The "their children" have a parallel set of skills but these are mostly not regarded as skills by the society. For instance, the ability to run barefoot of the railway tracks full of sharp stones- is it not a skill? A kid acquires this ability through hardship; the skill ensures survival of the kid at many occasions. Moreover,

¹⁰⁴ These are the organisations that conduct theatre classes as part of their many other such classes. E.g. CLT Aban Mahal, Nehru Children's Museum etc.

¹⁰⁵ Due to the fact that most of the facilitators come from the middle class background 'our children' almost always indicates the children who share this background.

the fact that this is learnt out of necessity and not moral obligation sets it apart from most of the lessons that a child learns in school, lessons that might never be relevant for the kid learning it.

If a parallel parameter of abilities can be set then it would appear that the ‘their children’ know more than the ‘our children’ and the former can apply their knowledge more frequently. A survey conducted by the Rajasthan University, couple of years ago published the result that the IQ of the child laborers is higher than the schools kids¹⁰⁶ (Bandopadhyay 1999)¹⁰⁷. Therefore “their children” are not to be treated as if they are culturally lesser somewhere than the “our children”. This limitation is due to the rigid conceptualization of the term ‘culture’. The concept of ‘culture’ that was “... coined and named, in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, as a shorthand term for the management of human thought and behavior” got transformed into “... a descriptive term, a generic name for the already achieved, observed, and recorded regularities of population-wide conduct...” (Bauman, *Out of the Frying Pan and into the Fire, or the Arts between Administration and the Markets* 2008) Here again the process, the ‘becoming’ was replaced by a static existence.

For the “our children” while the target is to enhance their creative skills and probably do a production, for the “their children” it is first introducing them to what we call creative endeavor¹⁰⁸, making them realize that they have creative potentiality and then try to enhance them. Though it does not happen this way in practice, discovery first and development next, but this should also be erased from the conceptual level as well.

This is difficult because the facilitators mostly coming from the “other” socio-historical background from these “their children” may at times involuntarily retain certain remnants of ideals of their original position, or what Freire would call being “nostalgic towards [one’s]... origin.” (Freire 1970) A facilitator has no other way than to be conscious about these residues that might have remained in her/his psyche while working with children who constitute the “their children” for her/him.

¹⁰⁶ Even after considering the debates regarding the IQ, its applicability and viability to represent intelligence, and the sampling process of the survey it cannot be denied that children who have to deal with the roughness of the world more frequently have more reality sense than kids who do not have to do that.

¹⁰⁷ Asian Age. 12th June. 1995.

¹⁰⁸ “Our” creative endeavor.

Structural framework

For the purpose of the research two broad frameworks has been formulated according to their infrastructural organisation: theatre with the children in schools¹⁰⁹ and theatre with the children beyond the schools. The second category may seem the derived one from the name it is given, but in reality this is the mode that existed prior to the former. The reason behind using a derivative title is the practices which will be analysed under the 'theatre with children beyond schools' category are so varied that no other single title could do justice to all of them. On the other hand, they being practiced in a setup outside the school have certain features in common like flexible working hours, difference in the nature of the facilitator-participant¹¹⁰ relationship, opportunity to know each-other beyond the play making process etc.

Theatre, as far as the English experience goes, can be part of a school in two ways: either as a tool through which other subjects are taught or theatre as a separate subject. In West Bengal there are some examples about how a teacher successfully taught the rotation of the earth around the sun and the occurrence of day and night where she placed students as sun and earth and made them act like the planets, or how a teacher could impart history lessons by introducing role play among the children who would then act as the native kings and British colonizers etc¹¹¹. But this as a steady practice, using theatre as a tool of teaching has not gotten much importance in majority of the schools here. Two major factors responsible for that is firstly, the ignorance of the teachers and secondly the huge imbalance in teacher-student ratio¹¹².

Theatre as a separate subject is been practiced in two ways: either the school has a scheduled class for dramatics where throughout the year children can do the classes and may be at the end of each session come up with performance(s) or the school can organize short term theatre workshops where facilitators are invited to work with the children and in the end they put up a show. Theatre till recently has not been introduced as a subject like history or social

¹⁰⁹ It is necessary to clarify here that by 'school' only formal schools are mentioned here.

¹¹⁰ A facilitator is also literally a participant but here this term means the children with whom the facilitator works.

¹¹¹ Students of class five were learning Doctrine of Lapse in their history class. The teacher asked a student to be Lord Dalhousie and a four more children became the native kings. The teacher then explained the background. The students acted as they thought right. Many of their realizations, frustration, helplessness, anger etc matched with the actual situation. Thus the children learned not only intellectually but also emotionally.

¹¹² These two factors will be discussed in details later.

science rather it was one optional amongst other extra-curricular activities but schools under CBSC board have introduced theatre as a subject a couple of months back.

Introduction of theatre in schools is not a new phenomenon. The practice started in the early 20th century not only in the West but in Bengal as well and gradually acquired support as more and more people realized that the goal of any education system gets complemented by theatre. The reason being

“Theatre evokes a total awareness of surroundings, it leads to the unknown, to the discourses of the self with all its goodness and all its discrepancies when one faces the reality and understands how the world changes from bad to good or vice versa in concrete material terms, there is bound to come a change in person’s life.” (Tagore 1926)

The first educationist of India, Rabindranath Tagore had placed immense importance on theatre and he introduced it in Shantiniketan¹¹³. He had realised the hollowness of the education system of his time. To which he commented

“আমাদের সমস্ত জীবনের শিকড় যেখানে, সেখান হইতে শতহস্ত দূরে আমাদের শিক্ষার বৃষ্টিধারা বর্ষিত হইতেছে, বাধা ভেদ করিয়া যেটুকু রস নিকটে আসিয়া পৌঁছিতেছে সেটুকু আমাদের জীবনের শুষ্কতা দূর করিবার পক্ষে যথেষ্ট নহে।”¹¹⁴ (Tagore, Shikkha 1910)

He therefore thought of introducing various art forms in the curriculum. But in the present scenario would that be able to solve the problem, is the one should ask.

At present in West Bengal a big debate is going on regarding the introduction of theatre in school curriculum i.e. theatre as a separate subject with a proper syllabus. People who are supporting this agenda are more in number. They argue in favor of it by drawing largely from Western theory;

“Approaching the work from a scientific standpoint, the student is taught to assimilate and master the technique and principles that govern all right expression, arriving

¹¹³ Shantinikaten is the school established by Rabindranath Tagore. It is in a place called Bolpur, Birbhum. Certain practices that were started in the school, incorporating various art forms, teaching technique etc was unique to the subcontinent though it was actually carrying the legacy of the ancient *Ashram* system.

¹¹⁴ “The shower of education is raining very far from where the roots of our life actually are. The amount of sap which is coming crossing the barriers is not enough to erase the drought of our life.” Tagore was talking about the education system propounded by the British and its inevitable conflict with the native reality.

thereby at a discovery of his true self and the power of his own thought. The work then is not only practical but educative.”¹¹⁵ (Anne L. Flistos and Gail S. Madford (eds.) 2004)

Discovering one's self is the basis for all education and theatre helps in doing that.

Theatre practitioners who were engaged with developing children's theatre had an idea and practise knew that it would not be possible for many of the children to do theatre once they grow up. Even then they offered theatre to them in the hope that if not practitioners, this practice can build a generation of aesthetically sound theatre audience, who can support the practice. This logic is also used today in advocating theatre's inclusion in school curriculum.

Theatre provides a safe space where a child can experiment with the various ways of life without being afraid of getting punished. The role play allows one to see an event from different perspectives thus not only to understand other's position but also one's own position from other's point of view. This mirroring effect may turn a person into a more considerate and rational one, allowing space to others. Schechner says, "... the long infancy and childhood... is an extended training and the rehearsal period for the performance of adult life" (Schechner 2002) and theatre can make this training a joyous one.

Moreover, when children learn by doing and not by listening¹¹⁶ and thus get involved emotionally, intellectually, rationally and sometimes physically with the learning process the effect lasts much longer. By doing they can check the validity of the lessons and can formulate their own set of logic to back it up. This enables them to believe in what they are learning and not simply memorize them.

Theatre has always been used as an educative medium and the attempt to incorporate it into school, another educative institution can be seen as an extension of that tradition.

However, how far are the schools truly educative? what idea of education is practised in them? - are questions overlooking which would be an act of naïve hope. Those few who are against the idea of incorporating theatre in school say that at two levels children's theatre and the mode of teaching practised in the schools contradict each other.

¹¹⁵ Fiderlick James, J. "The Department of Drama at Drake University." *Association of American Colleges Bulletin*, 22 (November), 1936: 451-453

¹¹⁶ Listening to the lessons that the teacher gives is the prevalent mode of teaching in almost all the schools in West Bengal. The situation may not be very different from other part of the country.

Gramsci mentioned that the 'Humanist' schools aimed at total development of culture, an individual's ability to think independently and to find one's own way in life. With the emergence of modernity and specialization in various activities the world needed specialists and schools were established for that. Now there are schools giving vocational training to the lower rung of the society and for the upper rung the schools preserve the intellectual lessons. Thus the choice of the schools pre-determines the course of one's life (Gramsci 1993).

On the other hand "... since the sixteenth century, the image of the isolated student, the student who reads and writes by himself, has been the essence of our conception of scholarship." (Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner 1969). This idea has not changed much over the years. How theatre, a collective way of learning, will then find its place in the institution that perpetuates these practices is a vital question.

Theoretically the agendas of theatre and education have a vast area in common- preparing the learners for their future, enable them to think independently, be critical of the reality and be able to analyse what is going around in order to find one's place in the world, in relation with the others. But educational institutions have successfully placed the ideas upside down as "... what passes for a curriculum in today's schools is... but a strategy of distraction... it is largely designed to keep students from knowing themselves and their environment in any relative sense." (Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner 1969).

The basic problem with the process of schooling today is that the teachers think that their job is to "...get something they think they know into the head of the people who don't know it." (Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner 1969). This is what Paulo Freire calls the 'banking concept' of education where the teacher is the active subject and the student is the passive object and the receiver. Freire calls this a way of oppression where individual intervention from the students' part is denied as their ignorance is regarded absolute. What Freire advocates for is "dialogue". It is the liberating way of learning-teaching where the 'co-intentional education' binds the teacher and student who jointly look for answers to the questions. In the process they learn from each other and become teacher-students and student-teachers (Freire 1970).

Theatre with children must follow this dialogic structure to be true to its purpose of enabling critical faculty in a child. Moreover, the facilitator/teacher must realize that the focus should be on the children learning through the process and not her teaching them. The structure of the process has to be determined by the needs of the children and not what the facilitators

have in mind. Unlike the other subjects that mostly talk about what has been done in the past, in theatre every moment is an invention and therefore cannot exist prior to the participant. One of the largest barriers in the path of education is that the lessons exist prior to and irrespective of the nature of the children. Therefore children find the lessons boring and confusing because these are not formulated considering their particular needs. Rather it a generalised structure that the syllabus makers think are either relevant for the students or that they must know them whether or not they are connected to their lives in any way. These are two main reasons as John Holt say that fail a child (Holt 1964). The children who fail gets punished which embosses a sense of fear amongst all and this fear is the third reason of failure. It is an unending spiral from which children find no escape.

Biswajit Biswas¹¹⁷ observes that there is one basic difference between processes of school and theatre. In schools today, a pyramidal structure gets used with the teachers at the top and students at the bottom. In theatre the structure is circular where no one person is structurally superior. From this what can be seen is that in school situation the link between the students is through the teacher but in theatre everybody is connected to the other¹¹⁸.

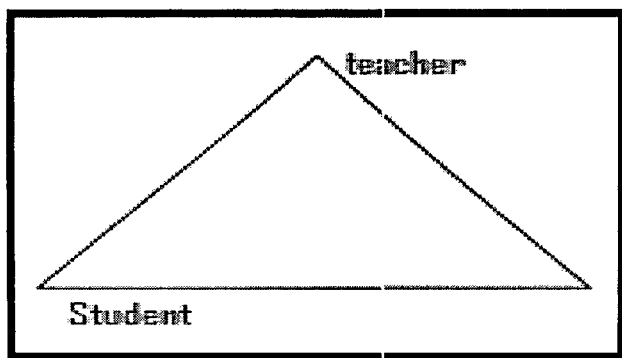


Figure 1: The teacher-student structure in schools

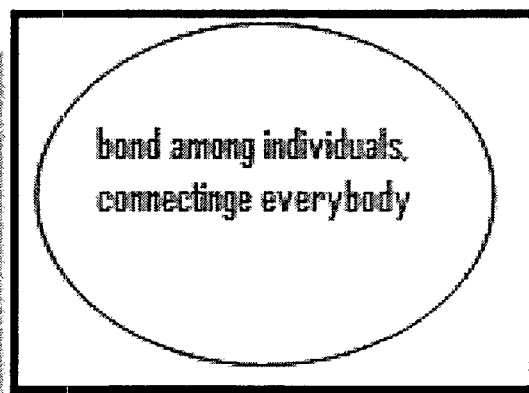


Figure 2: The structure of a theatre activity

Rudraprasad Sengupta, one of the pioneers of children’s theatre in West Bengal said that in children’s theatre the facilitator must not say, “এটা ঠিক হয়নি। কারণ এখানে হবার কিছু নেই।”¹¹⁹

There is no pre-determined end result. The process that the children are happily engaged with the work is the most important thing here. The schools where the result is given maximum

¹¹⁷ An ex-NSDan, now the director of Shantipur Rangapeeth, a theatre group that has a separate children’s section.

¹¹⁸ This is an ideal situation. Domination and monologic command is not rare in the domain of theatre as well.

¹¹⁹ “This is not been done correctly because nothing is to be made out of it.”

importance how will theatre benefit itself without shedding all its radical and promising attributes?

Will theatre be allowed the space to experiment? Peter Brook had observed “আমার বারবার মনে হয় যে ছোটদের আমরা গভীর বিষয় দিই না নিজেদের মানরক্ষার ভয়ে। ...অনেক সময় তা বড়দের চমকে দেয়। তখন মনে হল আমি জানি যে আমি এ জিনিস সামলাতে পারব না। তাই ছোটদের এসব দিই না। ছোটদের অনেক জায়গায় পঙ্গু করে রাখি। ছোটো করে রাখি।”¹²⁰ (Brook 2013). Where “...imagination is "schooled" to accept service in place of value” (Illich 1971) can theatre find a place?

Moreover, theatre would, if applied properly encourage the participants to raise questions and all those who have worked with children have the experience that children are capable of raising very basic but very difficult questions about the reality. They ask “why do the rich people not share their wealth? How can the thief be punished he stole because he was hungry?” etc. “Once you have learned to ask questions... you have learned how to learn and no one can keep you from whatever you want and *need to know*.” (Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner 1969) That is what those who are in power are afraid of, subjects asking questions. Will they then allow theatre with all its radical potentials to ‘contaminate’ the future generation? If not then theatre would be yet another tamed art practice catering to the needs of those who are in power.

“ইস্কুল বলিতে আমরা যাহা বুঝি সে একটা শিক্ষা দিবার কলা। মাস্টার এই কারখানার একটা অংশ।... কলের একটা সুবিধা, ঠিক মাপে ঠিক ফরমশ-দেওয়া জিনিসটা পাওয়া যায়...”¹²¹ (Tagore, Shikkha 1910). Therefore if the school is turned into a factory there will hardly be any space for unplanned surprises or shocks. Every action and their outcomes planned will leave no possibility for unwanted deviations.

This factor is relevant for both the practices but applicable largely in case of theatre in schools because here there is a structure existing prior to the students and the teachers. A person with all good intentions will feel equally trapped here like the children.

At the infrastructural level also there are certain problems. First one is the sheer number of students. Those who are demanding theatre in school curriculum and drawing examples from

¹²⁰ “I feel it again and again that we do not give complex issue to children to save our prestige.... Often it surprises the adults. I realised then that I cannot handle this so I do not give them these topics. We often cripple the children. Keep them as children.”

¹²¹ “What we understand by school is that it is a educating machine. Teacher is a part of that factory... The advantage of machine is it can deliver goods exactly in the shape which was ordered for.”

England have mostly overlooked this point. Firstly, in England under the TIE projects the TIE company with the teacher-actors, dramaturges used to work for the children but here the children are the participants. Secondly, in England the ideal situation for the TIE companies would demand the teacher-student ratio to be 1:16 and the situation was quite close to that. Here in the private schools the ratio is at least 1:40 and conditions of the government aided schools is much worse where the ratio is 1:200 at times. How in those schools theatre is possible? Formulating a generalized syllabus applicable for all the schools would only create more problems in the latter group of schools.

One way of handling this crisis is not to work with the entire class but select a few which will then bring another set of problems: how to select the few? On what basis should they be selected? Will it not be an in-human process favouring some over the others? Selecting few would create a division amongst the students and entire process would then fall into the trap of "... a competitive society that over values applause, that glorifies the star and ignores the supporting player..." (Landy 1982). This 'divide and rule' might ensure smooth functioning of the process but instead of making a collective communitarian existence it would create competition and tension amongst the students.

Another way to cope with this problem is to employ more teachers into the field. This will lead to the second infrastructural problem: there will be job openings but where will these teachers come from? How will the teachers be evaluated? Will the government be able to create permanent posts? Seeing the condition of West Bengal where recruiting para-teachers has been the trend for last couple of years, employment of permanent teachers does not seem an option. Facilitators must build a rapport with and gain the trust of the students to work with them. If the facilitator, being a non-permanent staff, leaves the school the process gets defunct and a new facilitator has to start from the very beginning. The schools might try to manage the classes with the available teachers or people who have some degrees in the field might get the job. Coaching centres might open, offering crash courses to train the teachers. It would be the same thing that happened to the 'work education'¹²².

Mahatma Gandhi's notion of *Nai Talim* (new education) that he advocated in 1937 instructed for "not 'vocation cum literacy training' but literacy training through vocational training." He wanted his students to "earn when you learn" thus be able to pay for their own education

¹²² Work education is a subject in most of the schools in West Bengal where the students are taught various things, knitting sweaters, sewing, book binding, making matches, soaps and phenyl, making soft toys etc.

(Chanda, Syllabus- e Natyashikkha 2008). This way the self-worth of the students will increase for being economically independent and also skills will be enhanced which would enable them to find jobs later.

Work education was incorporated with this idea in mind. Today the situation is different. The students hardly make the things. Either the other members of the family make those for them or they simply buy it from shops. Supplying the ready-made materials required for work education is a business now and everybody including the teachers who grade the children on these stuffs know about it.

“In their institutional form [performing arts] were considered vital to the social, oral and educational resources... and therefore good business, especially in new centres of population”.¹²³ (Anne L. Flistos and Gail S. Madford (eds.) 2004). The situation is unfortunately no very different here. Answering to the question whether introducing children’s theatre in school would do any good Rudraprasad Sengupta said, “... এতে হয়ত আমাদের উপকার হবে- মানে থিয়েটারের শিক্ষকরা টিউটোরিয়াল খুলবে। রবীন্দ্রনাথ শেখরপীয়ার নিয়ে নোট দেওয়া যাবে!...থিয়েটারের পাণ্ডাদের খুব সুবিধা হবে- থিয়েটারের উন্নতি হবে কিনা জানিনা।”¹²⁴ (Nathadhar Daake Ramgopal Monche Rudraprasad Sengupta 2012) If development of theatre cannot be guaranteed how can it be claimed for the children?

Minimum necessity of theatre is a working space, for the workshops, rehearsals etc and congested classrooms are not apt for that. Most of the schools of this state do not have a space like this (Chanda 2012). Will then theatre turn into a subject taught only theoretically?

This leads to the third problem i.e. the pattern of evaluation. Theatre is a subject based on practical experiments and unlike physics or chemistry there is no one right answer. While the results are unpredictable how is formulation of a general evaluation process possible? Theatre workers have different ideas about evaluating theatre. Adrija Dasgupta¹²⁵ says that the evaluation should be done considering the involvement of the students. Kaushik Sen¹²⁶ says that the teacher can make two groups of children in his mind, who are more able and who are

¹²³ Lowrey, W. McNeil. *The Past Twenty Years. The performing arts in American Society*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978.

¹²⁴ “This will probably benefit us- I mean theatre teachers would open tutorials. Notes can be given on Rabindranath, Shakespeare... Theatre masters would gain from it, cannot tell whether it is going to benefit theatre.”

¹²⁵ She is an ex-NSDan, an actress and an awarded director. She has experience of working with children both in and beyond schools.

¹²⁶ An eminent theatre practitioner, he has worked with the children’s of South Point School, Kolkata.

not so. The students should never know who belongs to which group. No doubt this is a unique idea but then how the evaluation would be conducted remains unresolved. It was surprising to view though that many theatre practitioners who are advocating for introduction of theatre in schools do not have any clear idea about how the evaluation is to be done.

One solution can be not conducting any examination of theatre but then it would follow the same path as Life Skills education. Life skills education¹²⁷ more of an interactive subject was offered to the schools in the last few years. The project was well conceived, the directions to the schools were planned and not wanting to create pressure in the children it was decided that there will be no examination for this subject. What happened in most of the schools especially in suburban and rural areas is that the scheduled classes were used by the teachers to finish the syllabus of their respective subjects.

What can be deduced from the above arguments is that theatre in schools- either as a subject or an extra-curricular activity- has immense possibilities. Yet, under the current infrastructural situation this potentials hardly have a chance to be actualised. Schools which are referred to while speaking for introducing theatre are the few posh private schools that have the necessary infrastructures. The 'other' schools cannot afford to feel the pressure. Moreover, continuous state surveillance on the teaching syllabus in West Bengal proves how naïve it would be to assume that state will not intervene in the theatre making process in anyway. The censorship might bar children from asking questions freely.

The few posh private schools of the metropolis and suburban areas have the necessary infrastructures- spacious rooms, favourable teacher-student ratio, students coming from economically solvent families due to they can afford to spend time for these classes, considerate parent etc- necessary for theatrical activities to be able to maximize its potential. However, even then the goal of building a team, inculcating community ethos might seem a farfetched idea. This is because the infrastructures alone cannot guarantee the achievement of the target; rather they need something more that can bind them together, the play making process. It is to be considered that in these posh schools the competition among the students is higher than many other schools. The facilitator must be cautious about that while working with the children. Saying stuff like “তোর জন্যেই তো খারাপ হচ্ছে”¹²⁸, “তোর দ্বারা আর কিছু হবে না”¹²⁹

¹²⁷ This project was conceptualized by WHO to make the students more competent in adjusting with the challenges of the reality. Basic sex-education, counseling, emotion management etc fell under its course.

¹²⁸ “You are the one messing things up”

¹²⁹ “You are not capable of doing anything.”

etc crushes the personality of the child which impedes any effort to establish a functional relation, with the medium, the facilitator, the fellow actors or the world. Moreover saying, “ও তো তোর থেকে ভাল পারে”¹³⁰, “ঠিক করে বল নাহলে তোর পাট অন্য কাউকে দিয়ে দেব।”¹³¹ are very effective way to control the children but reminding the children of firstly the competition and secondly the supreme authority of the facilitator sabotages the practice itself. Finally uttering something like “তেরা এত বাচ্চাবাচ্চা কেন?”¹³² and that the facilitator can rightfully demand more mature responses from the children is the simple act of negating their identities. While working with the children the facilitator must also keep in mind that in no way s/he should violate the personal space of the child.

Some of these problems do not occur in theatre with children beyond schools. Various different practices come under this category: workshops organised by theatre groups, children’s theatre groups, theatre groups having children’s section, theatre classes conducted by few organisations, non-formal educationists using theatrical tools, NGOs working with children etc. One advantage that these activities enjoy is that they can formulate the structure of theatre process according their own requirement. Not having to abide by any pre-constructed rules they are more capable of introducing changes as and when necessary considering the priorities of the children. Most of these activities occur either during the weekends or during vacations so that it is convenient for the children.

Some facilitators working with the children have shared this view that most children normally have an apathy mixed with fear towards the school therefore they take time to open up in the school setting. Same children working with the same facilitators beyond schools can open up more freely. The facilitators can also act more freely beyond schools not having to maintain the dominating codes.

Mostly the targets of the workshops are introducing children to the art of theatre and/or do a production. Groups who work with children throughout the year focus more on continuous training and play making which then is included in the repertoire of the group. In most of the workshops the play that is made gets performed on the last day after which the group dissolves. When theatre groups do workshop inviting children to join and not only with their own children a varied array of participants congregate which gives the workshop a truly

¹³⁰ “S/he can do better than you”

¹³¹ “Say properly or I’ll give your part to someone else.”

¹³² “Why are you so childish?”

multi-layered status. It is easier to see how relationship among these children who were unknown to each other changes through the workshop process. Not only their relationship with each other but their perception regarding the world and their responses to it also changes. Sumonto Das who worked with the platform children under an NGO comments how the process of working together initiates certain practices as offshoots of the process. The NGO he worked with aimed at reintegrating children in their families, educating them, teaching them certain skills that have market value etc. Along with these targets what Mr. Das saw was achieved were lesser engagement with violence, spending less money and time for substance abuse, building relatively friendly terms with each other etc. These references reaffirm the hope that through theatre a transformation towards a better future, collective living is possible.

Theatre with children beyond schools is not a practise free of problems. Some of them operate at the individual level i.e. what the individual facilitators/organisers expect from the process and some other at the level of larger structures i.e. state sanctions and funding. These two factors are not mutually exclusive rather they influence one another

It is noteworthy to see that most of the people, who are working with children, in and beyond schools, draw largely from the common body of Western theories of theatre and education in justifying their activities. What many of them try to adopt are the technicalities - introducing TIE, proposal to incorporate theatre in school curriculum, asking for funding from state etc- and not the target like encourage the children to develop analytic and critical faculty, be able to raise question, know the reality both rationally and emotionally. Therefore on one hand they lament that the infrastructural provisions required for the smooth functioning of those techniques are not available here, on the other they could engage in children's theatre without having to be true to its goals.

The facilitators engaged with children's theatre in and around Kolkata show a variety of thoughts regarding the process. Pinaki Guha¹³³ believes that to let the children act freely can only be allowed for really small kids. After a certain age it is necessary to train the children so that the performances acquire a level of 'professional perfection'. Shailen Ghosh¹³⁴ had said in 1991¹³⁵ that the only way for children's theatre groups to gather money is the call-

¹³³ Director of a children's theatre group, Chetla Krishti Samsad.

¹³⁴ Eminent Bengali writer and founder of one of the first children's theatre group of West Bengal, Shishu Rangan.

¹³⁵ In an article published in Bohurupee (76), a Bengali theatre periodical.

shows which are not much in number though. Clubbing his experience with Mr. Guha's comment it can be said that these groups have to have a minimum level of 'professional perfection' so that they get call-shows and earn money necessary for the group to continue working.

Ashish Kumar Khan¹³⁶ was very practical in mentioning that a space for children to work is very necessary, which is however, hardly available in Kolkata. Children's theatre, he says, must not overlook the economic aspect because the cost of production, including the auditorium charges, technicians cost etc is not very less from the adults' theatre.

It is true that the production costs have increased over the years and this made most of the facilitators advocate for support from the central and/or state government. The point they are missing most of the time is that availability of money will make the production large and full of grandeur. But ideally the process should be more important. On the other hand it is possible to change the mode of production i.e. doing theatre on unconventional locations, fields, streets, parks etc would not only decrease the production cost but also help to be connected with people at a large scale. But this does not appear as a valid option for many of them.

In an informal conversation a facilitator who earlier in the conversation had said that how successful was the play he made, commented that firstly he gave roles to the children and while they were busy memorising their lines he finished the set and costume designing. Thus within a couple of weeks he could put up a grand show. The play he was talking about was not children's theatre because though the content was understandable to the children¹³⁷ they were used as just another tool like the light and music. They were physically present but not participating in the actual sense of the term.

Unfortunately this is not a stray incident. Another children's theatre facilitator who has a children's theatre group mentions in an interview, “ছোটোরা সৃজনশীলতায় সবচেয়ে এগিয়ে। বড়রা ওদের থেকে শিথি!... ছোটোদের কোন মলিনতা নেই। ওদের যেমন চালাই তেমনি চলে। ছোটোরাই ভবিষ্যৎ।”¹³⁸

What future is he envisioning? Definitely not the one which the theories of children's theatre aspire to reach.

¹³⁶ The director of Bidden Street Shubham, a children's theatre group that conducts regular theatre classes and workshops by invited facilitators.

¹³⁷ He picked up one of Upendrakishore Roy Chowdhury's story.

¹³⁸ “Children are most advanced in creativity. We adults learn from them. Children do not have any impurity. They act exactly as we ask them to. They are the future.”

The reason behind this is the ignorance on the part of the facilitators about what children's theatre can and should do. A person who would be working with children must know child psychology, sociology, (Brook 2013) theories of education, knowledge about different art practices along with theatre, its ideologies, techniques and forms. Mental health counsellor Mohit Ranadip argues that the indicators of a person's mental well being are her/his clear conception about her/his own self, understanding her/his emotions and feelings and expressing them in a socially accepted way. All of these are necessary to face and solve everyday challenges. This forms the core of WHO's Life Skill education. To ensure this through theatre the facilitator must have ample knowledge about these issues. Now that children's theatre has become a marketable product many people are joining this domain to secure a career. The sole sufferers are the children.

Another form that this ignorance takes is bringing the children theatre into competition. The idea that children's theatre can enable the participants to establish relationship with other people gets applied here in a twisted way. Instead of creating a cooperating relationship it breeds competition, the hunger for being the best. On inter-group level there is competition and by crowning best actress/actor and thus by starring her/him the competition penetrates inside the group. A facilitator justifies this by saying, "সমালোচনা সত্ত্বেও ওদের প্রতিযোগিতার মঞ্চে নিয়ে যাই। শো বাড়লে ওদের এক্সপিরিএন্স বাড়বে, প্রচার বাড়বে।"¹³⁹ This is the decision of the adult facilitator who thought it would be right for the children without consulting them. While on one hand theatre is trying to cope with the violent competition that has penetrated every aspect of human existence an argument like this is naïve and harmful.

Seeing from another aspect, it might seem that it is not the naïve ignorance of the facilitators after all. Rather it is well-thought plan of forcing theatre to be yet another mechanism to breed conformists. Here comes the larger structural force- funding.

Grant from the Cultural Ministry of the Central Government in West Bengal (2012-2013):
(Mukhopadhyay 27.9.2012)

	Number of groups	Amount of money
Salary Grant	183	101520000
Production Grant	112	54670000

¹³⁹ "In spite of criticism I take them to the competitions. More show will increase their experience, increase the popularity."

Cultural Functions Grant	35	9003000
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Division of groups according to location: Kolkata-93 (15 new groups)

Suburbs- 48 (17 new groups)

Howrah- 7 (3 new groups)

It can no more be said that there is no money but the question is where is this money getting used.

Central government on the one hand is enthusiastic in bringing theatre in schools but on another it had shut down programmes like “Culture and Value in Education” (Sungupta 10.1.2013), cutting the grants, etc. Does that not mean that more regimented tightly syllabus-ed programmes of children’s theatre are favored over more open ended experimental theatre programmes? “All authorities get nervous when learning is conducted without a syllabus” because learning without syllabus may take unpredictable turns any time which the authorities might not be prepared for. Learning encourages thinking and “...once you start a man thinking, there is no telling where he will go. Just as unnerving is the fact that there is no telling *how* he will go.” (Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner 1969).

Why then one may ask the government is taking any initiative at all regarding children’s theatre if it is such a problematic area? To answer this it would be apt to quote Tolstoy as was quoted by Tagore:

“The strength of the Government lies in the people’s ignorance, and the Government knows this, and therefore always oppose true enlightenment... And it is most undesirable to let the Government while it is spreading darkness *pretend to be busy with the enlightenment of the people*. It is doing this now by means of all sorts of pseudo-educational establishments which it controls: schools, high schools, universities, academies, and all kind of committees and congresses.”¹⁴⁰ (Tagore, Shikkha 1910)

It is not enough to suppress an activity but to introduce mechanisms that pretend to do the same activity is also necessary so that on one hand the benevolent face of the power is maintained and the truly disturbing activities do not find any space to flourish.

¹⁴⁰ My italics.

A collective search against oppressive reality is something the dominating systems have always wanted to suppress. Therefore under its fold development of a community based on freedom of expression, cooperation, mutual trust and respect is not only difficult but also impossible to achieve. Those who claim that voicing against the oppressive system is possible while taking advantage from the same system forget that the incentives that the state gives are but another strategy to win the dissenting entities over. Dependence on the state, or any body of power, can turn a rebel into a conformist.

It can only be said following Tolstoy, “[I]t is strange to see good wise people spending their strength in a struggle against the Government, but carrying in this struggle on the basis of whatever laws the Government itself likes to make.” (Tagore, Shikkha 1910)

Another major way of working with children using theatrical tools is the works done by the NGOs. This requires a separate analysis due to its unique target population and theoretical bodies that it draws from. This belongs to the ‘children’s theatre beyond the school’ category and often incorporates non-formal schooling in its fold.

Special case of the NGOs

In order to understand better the role that the NGOs are playing in the society today, it is necessary to briefly analyse how and in what context did they originate.

Pathik Basu observed that the genesis started in the post World War West. It was late 50’s-early 60’s. The war was over but the tussle between America and the industrially developed nations of Europe continued over the possession of the post war abundance. By late 60’s various social movements started which gave a jolt to the capitalist system in those countries. But by 70’ the shock was absorbed and a new field of acquiring superiority was visible: the field of information technology. Daniel Bell observed that the developed countries were moving from the position of “পণ্যপাদন”¹⁴¹ to “তথ্যনিয়ামক”¹⁴². As the revolution in the arena of information technology started they realized that they are largely capable of controlling the ideas of the people by exposing them to abundant information, selected to fit their purposes. Basu refers to Alvin Toffler who says that the idea of economy forming the base and the culture, knowledge etc forming the superstructure was turned upside down. Knowledge or rather information is the base now. Information about everything is available to everybody,

¹⁴¹ Producing goods

¹⁴² Manufacturing and controlling information

apparently¹⁴³. Therefore anybody, as it says, can be anything s/he wants and information are available to aid that. Thus the social fabric gets torn down and class divisions blurred. Here appear the NGOs as the managers, the intermediary provider of facilities between the state and its people.

“শ্রেণী তত্ত্ব বস্তু যতক্ষণ শ্রেণী হিসাবে কিছু পাওয়া যায়। পাবার সাপেক্ষে এক ঝাণ্ডার তলায় আমরা দাঁড়াতে পারি।”¹⁴⁴ (Basu 2008). While NGOs ensure the assistance for the achievements and promise to give some facilities to the people with certain features, people tend to shed the differentiating traits and claim commonality to come under the category. Thus NGOs get an almost homogeneous group to target, who chose this position apparently voluntarily.

What do the NGOs do? They play the role of the managers, managing the social and cultural necessities and demands of particular group. For Bauman “to manage means to *limit the freedom of the managed*”¹⁴⁵. In the deep rooted assumption that justifies the existence of the managers “lies the premonition and/or acceptance of an unequal, asymmetrical social relation: ... between the managers and the managed... the knowing and the ignorant...” (Bauman 2008)

There are a couple of NGOs working with children in Kolkata and adjacent areas. Prajak is one of them, which works with the platform children of four big stations of West Bengal: Kharagpur, Maldah, Asansol and New Jalpaiguri. They have drop-in centers near the platforms where these children are offered shelter. The goal of this NGO is “education, suggestions for savings and rehabilitation of the children” says Aranya Sen, administrative personnel of this NGO. This organisation hires consultants from different areas like theatre, dance, mountaineering etc to work with the children. It does not use theatre as production or play making per se but theatrical tools like theatre games, building images etc to achieve the proposed goals.

Mr. Sen expressed his doubt whether only theatre intrinsically can inculcate community feeling, a sense of cooperation and togetherness among children who are sidelined in our society. By saying this he hints at a very pertinent argument that in an adverse situation theatre solely may not be able to do this work. Living beyond a safe-zone where one might

¹⁴³ In reality the information are manufactured, distorted and omitted to suit the purpose of the information conglomerates.

¹⁴⁴ “Class is real for so long something can be achieved by belonging in it. We can come under a flag if we get something for that.”

¹⁴⁵ Italics in original text.

expect protection, cooperation and camaraderie, for these children it is a luxury which they can hardly afford. Here the children form groups on the basis of power dynamics. How can one benefit from a relationship is the major concern here. The primal urge of survival and making groups to ensure that, is visible violently in these situations. The group is not formed in the socially accepted sense of the term 'cooperation' where it is also a moral choice along with a rational one rather here it is a bare survival strategy. The power relation in this kind of group is heavily unequal and this inequality holds the group together where submission is ensured in exchange of security and protection.

This kind of collectivity formation forces the humans to a subhuman level. Transforming these collectives, established on the principle of sheer necessity into a more humanitarian group where membership of the groups would be a matter of rational, emotional and intellectual choice is a difficult process. These groups are maintaining a primitive attribute in a post-primitive time and that's why the form of this group seems odd and therefore worthy of being re-structured. This is the base logic from which this particular NGO draws its validity.

"We could argue that it is the wealthiest people in the world who have lost community, insulated from the rest of the world transferring from their gated mansion in their gated neighbourhood to their bullet-proofed car, their private plane, and to the five-star hotel in some other anonymous town... No one is prescribing them community"¹⁴⁶ (Cooper 2008)

Interesting enough to see that NGOs like this focus on those children who are labeled as 'deprived' and have deviated from what is regarded as the standard living condition. What they train them with therefore are skills that are regarded as important by the society which they have deviated from. Under the 'reintegration' training these children are also taught how to find their space back in the society, both socially and economically. Many children run away from their family- generally the first social institution child encounters- for various reasons. No matter how many of these incidents happen this way of living is not accepted as another way of life or even a possibility. It is always a deviation from the 'normal'. Assuming what is 'ideal' and therefore better lies beneath this. It is the development discourse all over again where the deviant has to be turned into a conformist; those who run from one social

¹⁴⁶ Taylor, M. *Public Policy in the Community*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

institution have to be brought under another one operating in the same society and sharing the same principles.

It will be too arrogant to think that these children are not in need of support and cooperation from those who live a safer life. Whether they need help and/or welfare programmes are heated topics. What gets left out almost entirely is a thorough investigation of the causes responsible for the condition of these children. A child learns the ways of the world mostly through the process of socialization. Therefore an individual's psychological state cannot be held solely responsible for her/his condition. If a child runs away from home due to domestic violence the task does not end at talking to the child and its parents, counseling them and trying to put the child back in the family. Why did the family take resort to violence in the first place- need to be seen. The adverse social conditions, poverty, illiteracy, corruption, violence at the larger level, which are responsible for the dysfunctional relationships, cannot be addressed simply by offering welfare to the victims. It demands a thorough restructuring of the systems of power. The work done by the NGOs are important for the children because they cannot wait till the day when finally this transformation will take place. But along with it these programmes should not forget the larger goals. Their presence as buffers, releasing tension, frustration, negotiating with the voice of the protest, only ensures the sustenance of the imbalanced and hence oppressive power structure.

There are two modes of theatre practice whose theoretical body is referred heavily by the NGOs to justify their activities. These two forms- Community theatre and Theatre for Development- are not mutually exclusive at the conceptual level but appear at different contexts.

Community theatre is an interdisciplinary practice where "there is commitment to dialogue, interaction and fundamental belief that the audience- the community- has something to offer; and that the very notion of artist/product/audience needs to be rethought. Artists lose their specialist status and become companions in collaborative search..." for a way towards transforming the current situation. Another term which is used to indicate either a broad spectrum of practices including community theatre or as an alternative to it is 'applied theatre'. The collapse of Communism in the early 90's, ensued a "new world disorder" as Baz Kershaw calls it. In this context applied theatre emerged "...begging questions about how the democratic principles that had been associated with all forms of community and educational theatre might be re-envisioned for the new millennium." (Nicholson 2011) This

form is called 'applied' because it is "... a medium of action, for reflection and most important, for transformation- a theatre in which new modes of being can be encountered and new possibilities of humankind be imagined."¹⁴⁷ (Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston 2009). This theatre focuses on the particular context of the participating people. It often happens that people of a locality mobilize themselves through this method with or without an external facilitator. People having theatre training often go back to their own localities to work or people invite facilitators to come and work with them. In these cases the realization of the necessity to adopt this theatrical method comes from within the community who voice their own demands and opinions about issues that affect them.

On the other hand Theatre for Development (TfD) is terminologically straight-jacketed. While in case of community theatre the aspiration is change and transformation inspired by a hope that the change will be for better, in case of TfD it is already pre-determined that the result will develop the condition of the people. As 'development' today is strategically equated with betterment in all aspects of life, this form gets heavily based on generalized ideas and their universal applicability.

Harry S. Truman in a speech in January, 1949 had said "... we must embark on a bold new program [sic] for the benefits of our scientific and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas." (Das 2008) From then onwards the drive of development visibly adopted the legacy of the 'white man's burden'. There is as if only one form of development, one epitome that everybody should aspire for and only one way to do that. Today the 'development' is planned by the experts and professionals hardly taking into consideration the opinion of the people on whom the developmental mechanism is to be employed. Human beings are not passive recipients therefore they retaliate to the imposition and eventually had to face the brutal force employed by the planners to teach the 'ignorant' people what is good for them. If this is the condition of the idea of 'development' then it is worth seeing how TfD finds its logic.

Syed Jamil Ahmed, faculty of the Department of Theatre and Music in the University of Dhaka had mentioned a particular instance when a visiting faculty from UK answering to a student in a conference that if there is any TfD project in his country said, "I'm afraid, no.

¹⁴⁷ Taylor, P. *Applied Theatre: Creating Transformative Encounters in the Community*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003.

But we have, or rather, we call it Community Theatre”. Ahmed deduced “Hence, the ‘world’ of Tfd is the ‘Third World’, more respectfully clothed as the ‘South’ ” (Ahmed 2002).

Community theatre is giving voice to many marginal communities to put forward their demands and reach a greater number of people. Thus at times the success could be translated into creating pressure on the local and regional administrative bodies to take necessary steps. In that respect it is inspirational for Tfd to take that course. However, Ahmed commented that the Tfd projects in the third world in reality further the agenda of globalization and market-ization in the name of poverty alleviation, social mobility and creating a better environment. He was specifically talking about Bangladesh though there is no reason to believe it to be a unique or exceptional case. In that case if Community theatre has a similar agenda then it’s a problem. But this single clue must not lead to the conclusion that Community theatre in the West changes its name and becomes Tfd in the South Asian Third World countries but the hint should be examined in order to understand both the concepts in their geo-temporal context.

The basic difference between Community theatre and Tfd is the nature of participation. There are so many forms of participation and it does not necessarily always indicate empowerment. Cook and Kothari¹⁴⁸ asked whether in development programmes in the third world, especially in Tfd projects participation has become a ‘new tyranny’. Richard Schechner comments, “participation is legitimate only if it influences the tone and possibility of the outcome of the performance... Without this potential for change participation is just one more ornamental, illustrative device: a treachery prepared to the audience while disguised as being on behalf of them.”¹⁴⁹ (Jackson 2011) By converting Freire’s idea of ‘dialogue’ as a liberating mode of interaction into ‘opinion sharing’ Tfd often betrays the cause (Ahmed 2002). Instead of ensuring “the participant’s genuine ownership of the work and their critical engagement with reality” (Preston 2009) most of the Tfd projects turn participation “into a parody, and an invitation to manipulative design...” (Rahnema 2009).

If a child participates into the theatre making process rationally, emotionally, intellectually and physically only then it can be called children’s theatre- as shown in the previous chapter. Children working under the NGOs hardly get that chance to explore their realities. First of all, the reason behind them coming under an NGO is that they are in some aspects deviated.

¹⁴⁸ Cook, B. and Kothari, U. (eds.) *Participation – the New Tyranny?* London: Zed Books, 2001.

¹⁴⁹ Schechner, R. *Environmental Theatre*. New York: Applause Books, 1994.

Their difference that makes their identity is negated and tried to be replaced with one which is more socially accepted. What they can say, do, even question in the training processes are often thought of.

Some NGOs operate on the basis of serving therapy to those who need it. In case of children the need is almost never felt by the children though it is not to deny that they enjoy the 'therapeutic' process which generally involves collective activities- theatre, dance, music, painting- in a safe space. Giving them the joyful experience is however, not the ultimate goal.

James Thompson who has experience of working with the children in 'conflict zones' mentions an incident, "... after playing some game the dramatherapists ask the children to tell their story of the day when tsunami hit¹⁵⁰. One of the children started crying and left the group. Later the dramatherapist complained, somewhat at a loss that they were 'not prepared to tell their stories' and 'all they want to do is play.'" (Thompson 2009). Therapy or no-therapy compelling one, especially a child to articulate an event of trauma is itself a traumatic experience for many. To tell and share the horrible experience so that one can be healed is a mono-dimensional way of looking at it. It is dogmatic in the sense that here the therapist/facilitator holds the power position as the one having remedies of the wounds and the participants are the injured ones who are to be taken care of. The event rather should be approached from as indirectly as possible says Tirthankar Chanda, one of the major children's theatre worker of West Bengal. This has two advantages. Firstly, not forcing one to discuss her/his trauma makes one feel less vulnerable as the secret is not revealed and secondly, addressing issues remotely associated with one's trauma enables one to track her/his own path towards her/his own fear and thus situate it in the bigger frame of their existence and gradually there is a better chance to move forward. One-to-one counselling is not recommended in dealing with these cases says Aranya Sen as facing the interviewer alone makes the child tensed and afraid, resulting in inability and/or refusal to answer. Collective counselling is more preferable because through this no single person is focussed therefore one feels less vulnerable. Moreover, the common sharing ground enables the children¹⁵¹ to establish bonds among themselves and collective effort to cope with the troubling incidents proves to be more effective than individual ones.

¹⁵⁰ The workshop was done in the camp of Tsunami survivors of southern Sri Lanka.

¹⁵¹ This happens in case of the adults as well.

The larger political agenda operating behind these theatre therapies, NGO-led managing of the deviated population, TFD etc is that the population which has for some reason or another detracted from the main stream of the society actually pose a threat to its authority and superiority. Their occupying a parallel reality is a constant reminder to the established status quo that an alternative is possible which they try to erase.

These are the problems with the NGOs at conceptual and ideal level. At the operational level there are some other problems. An experienced theatre practitioner said in his interview, “এনজিও যখন তখন টাকা মারবেই। ভাল এনজিও হলে কম টাকা মারবে বেশীটা কাজে লাগবে আর খারাপ এনজিও হলে বেশী মারবে আর কম কাজে লাগবে।”¹⁵². His statement gets supported by a person who himself is associated with an NGO working with the children, as he said, “এনজিওরা কুকুরের মতন। টাকা থাকলেই দৌড়ে যায়।”¹⁵³ What is then, one may ask, the target of an NGO, doing something beneficiary for its target population or use the condition of this people as an investment to run a profitable business?

These are not to mean that NGOs are basically all corrupt. They also have to work within certain limitations. One instance can clarify that. In an informal conversation a theatre worker who was planning to build an NGO to establish a school in Jhargram¹⁵⁴ said that he applied to the social welfare section of Bill Gates’ company which funds a lot of charitable projects worldwide. The reply from them was that funding is available for building hospitals, charitable health care units but not for school. The agenda was clear. Keeping these people in the state of perpetual dependency was preferred than giving them an avenue to be self-sufficient.

The problem at the core of these NGOs believing that development can be acquired this way is their ignorance of the fact that development is essentially a human phenomenon with multilayered existence. Addressing one part and overlooking the others cannot therefore produce any viable result. Amitava Saha was working with the teenage girls in the district of Purulia under a project of UNESCO, conducted by a Kolkata based NGO, Bangla Natok Dot Com. The issue was to see how far the condition of the girl students has changed after each of

¹⁵² “NGOs will eventually cheat money (from the project fund). If it is a good NGO then they steal less and use more, if it is a bad NGO then they will steal more and use less.”

¹⁵³ “NGOs are like dogs. They run after money.”

¹⁵⁴ A town of West Midnapore district, West Bengal. This town is the gateway of an area famously known as ‘Jangal Mahal’ where the strife between the Maoists and police is rampant. The inhabitants are mostly *adivasis*, heavily exploited by the economy.

them got a bi-cycle, from a national level *yojna*¹⁵⁵, to go to school. The play was almost completed and before the final show in which the District Magistrate was invited the officials of the NGO asked for a stage rehearsal at their presence. One part of the play showed how the girls have to carry the cycle over their head to cross a certain portion of the road which is in terrible condition and cannot be crossed in a cycle. The officials demanded to omit that part of the play and so it was done. Giving them a cycle was development enough. The officials did not want to create any controversy.

The idea of development thus reached these girls simply as an idea with no such implication in their lives. If these girls were asked what they think can better their condition and then plan the project it would have been a different narrative. This however, is hardly done.

In terms of education, NGOs sometimes adopt the non-formal mode of teaching which is more flexible than its formal counterpart. It prioritizes the necessities of the students as the classes are scheduled according to the students' convenience and topics are often decided by the students. Sandip Bandopadhyay says that the teacher comes to the class with an idea of what to be taught in mind. S/he introduces a discussion and the students join in. It happens quite often that the discussion takes a complete different turn than what the teacher had in mind and in that case instead of stopping the discussion the teacher might pose question to bring the topic back into the track. If that is not successful then the teacher needs to figure how fruitful this discussion can be made and tries to extract the optimum out of it. This is however, the ideal situation execution of which demands not only an expert teacher with a clear vision but also a transformation in conceptualizing the students.

In a textbook for non-formal education '*Porte Esho*'¹⁵⁶ it was written “শিশুদের মধ্যে দেখা যায় ভাঙ্গার প্রবণতা। তারা যুক্তি দিয়ে কিছু বিচার করে না। অকারণে ভয় পায়, পালাতে চায়। সত্যিমিথ্যা যাচাই করে না।”¹⁵⁷ (Bandopadhyay 1999). This book is published by Bengal Social Service League who was in charge of publishing the books for the literacy project of the government. If this is the notion that the teachers have of students then it can be imagined how helpless both of them would feel. The teachers might get frustrated that they cannot communicate with their students and the students on the other hand are frightened and cannot articulate that fear-which leads to a complete breakdown of dialogue. A dialogue is only possible when both the

¹⁵⁵ Project.

¹⁵⁶ Literally means 'Come to Study'

¹⁵⁷ “Children have a tendency to be destructive. They do not judge logically. They get afraid for no reason, they tend to flee. They do not check whether something is true or false.”

parties are given space to articulate their thoughts and both of them feel the issue to be important to their lives. Considering therefore that the children – or the other target population of the education- will never be able to understand what is good for them is the denial of their authority over their life. This is an act of oppression.

Paolo Freire in his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has quoted from *The Selected Work of Mao Tse-Tung*:

All work done for the masses must start from their needs and not from the desire of any individual, however well-intentioned. It often happens that objectively the masses need a certain change, but subjectively they are not yet conscious of the need, not yet willing or determined to make the change. In such cases, we should wait patiently. We should not make the change until, through our work, most of the masses have become conscious of the need and are willing and determined to carry it out... There are two principles here: one is the actual needs of the masses rather than what we fancy they need, and the other is the wishes of the masses, who must make up their own minds instead of our making up their minds for them. (Freire 1970)

Freire is very conscious in mentioning many times that the liberating discourse cannot occur without the active participation of those who are to be liberated. One cannot achieve liberation for the other and without the other. It is a collaborative process.

In case of children's theatre mostly the aim is to enhance their creative faculty but it is hardly ever asked whether the children feel the need. The adults decide the 'what' and 'how' of the activities which often position the children in a state where they fail to understand the 'why' of these activities. If the children do not understand the necessity then they will never be in the position to actively choose it over other options of spending energy. Once the tenure of the work is over the memories will be there but the effect will wear off sooner or later. Understanding is the greatest motivating power which no amount of imposition can match. Moreover, the question should be if theatrical activities are the need of the moment for the children around whom they are planned. If a child does not have the provision of daily bread asking her to come and do theatre would just be another variation of cruelty. Believing in the ideals of children's theatre must not blind one from being able to differentiate when children's theatre is a joint endeavor engaging the children and when it is simply a moralistic zeal coming from the middle class.

Hence

It must be clear by now that in the field of children's theatre the agendas of the organisers/ facilitators/ policymakers play the pivotal role to determine the process and the product. A feeling of togetherness comes automatically among the children if they work together for some time and if deliberately a 'divide and rule' mode of treatment is not adopted by the conductors of the work. Ensuring the sustenance of this feeling needs conscious effort. On the other hand, communicating the idea that being cooperative and considerate only to the people one is working with is not enough rather it is a practice which is to be done in all the arenas of life. It is a way of viewing the life and not only attaining efficiency in a particular art form.

Seeing this larger picture that one part of the society cannot claim to be developed if the other parts are perishing will enable one to understand that helping the latter part cannot be an act of charity done out of compassion. Rather it is needed to be done for one's own better existence. Development is only possible when it is collective and mutual.

However, this logical understanding seems utopic at the practical level. A world wide practice of 'development' by exploiting the powerless can hardly view its significance. The proposed research area is no alien to this practice. Domination is exercised in innumerable forms here. These organisations and institutions which work with the children exist in this very society. They therefore either must challenge the social order or conform to it and betray the core belief of the practice of theatre, or any art form i.e. reflecting the aspirations of the people and enabling them to be able to relate to the time. If the latter case is true –mostly available examples do not prove otherwise- then children are just exploited as pawns in society's way of extracting conformity from its citizens.

Modern democracy is representational and not participatory. These representations mostly are not "...produced through a climate of sensitivity, dialogue, respect and willingness for reciprocity" (Preston 2009) Thus the system allows domination of a few over many in the name of representation. The representation of the agency of the represented is negated by the agency of the representing lot so violently that the former assumes an absent presence. Under this system encouraging participatory theatre practice with the children, the future citizens, opens a realm of contradiction.

Chapter 3

THE CASE STUDY: A POSSIBILITY

The expectation to reach an answer in the last chapter regarding the vital question of devising a theatrical method to build community ethos is natural. Here, however, the effort is not to lay out a solution as it should be clear that any overarching attempt to resolve the problem of children's theatre, its role and relations to the society, has mostly led to the origination of generalized understanding, which eventually became a rigid inviolable structure.

Therefore, it should be very clearly stated at the beginning of the chapter that the case study that follows is not any sort of resolutionary model. It is an example of one possible way to deal with the complex relationships that children's theatre has with children and socio-political and cultural forces of the stated research area.

The name of the workshop which will be analysed in this chapter is 'Shishu Kishore Bikash Mela'¹⁵⁸. Initially the workshop was conducted with the children and therefore was called 'Shishu Mela'¹⁵⁹. Gradually as adolescents also started joining, the name had to change. 'Mela' means fair and in the history of performance this idea of fairground occupies a unique position- a place where the social rules can be bent and broken. It is a place for subverting the power structure. The organisers probably did not have these ideas in mind when they thought of the name. For them 'Mela' meant a congregating place of celebrating togetherness. The way the Camp operates, however, its emphasis on non-hierarchical relations, omission of concrete rules, encouraging questioning etc are reminiscent of a Bakhtinian fairground. The mostly used name for this workshop is, yet, none of the above mentioned ones but 'Camp'.

This chapter is largely based on anecdotes, interviews and expressions of conviction in the possibility of a better reality. As a consequence the theoretical connections are often compromised for emotional outcomes and beliefs. Moreover, a large number of respondents are young children who shared their experiences and feelings which then the researcher tried to analyze. This is not to say that the children were unable to structure their thoughts and needed any external assistance. Along the path of growing up the logics and rationales of childhood often change, which probably necessitates the presence of a mediator who is situated in a space in between the children and the adults who will be the major readers of this research project.

¹⁵⁸Literally meaning the 'fair of children and adolescents.'

¹⁵⁹Literally a 'fair of children'.

My position as the researcher in this project is really a space in between for many reasons. I became a part of this particular workshop at an early age¹⁶⁰ and therefore have internalized many of its beliefs and ideologies without any critical analysis. My father, Dr. Tirthankar Chanda, being one of the primary organisers I was conversant with the ideas underpinning this workshop on a daily basis. I knew other organisers personally much before the workshop actually started therefore my association with the Camp is different from most of the other participants. From the very beginning I was not just a participant but also a potential organiser. As I grew up along with the Camp I, like some of my friends, were almost promoted from the level of participants to young facilitators, working under the guidance of the older ones. It gave us an opportunity to enhance our ability of, developing ideas, managing children and building plays along with our own acting skills. This position made me realise again the in-between status, between the children and the older facilitators. Finally, my academic pursuit allowed me to read and know about the variety of theatre practices, their ideologies, aspirations, strategies, successes, failures, transformations etc which enhanced my critical faculty in viewing the workshop I am associated with since childhood. From this standpoint I find some lacuna in the process, both at the level of ideas and their applications, which might have otherwise been overlooked. This places me in an ‘outsider within’¹⁶¹ position where it is problematic to accept and believe in any idea without critically analysing it. Smooth acceptance or/and complete denial, both processes seem difficult from this position. However, as an advantage of this position I not only have access to the logical justifications working behind conceptualising this Camp but also the emotional journey that continues. Moreover, since my position shifted from a participant, to a facilitator and now to an observer, I find it effective as a methodology to tally my experiences and expectations with those I interviewed, the organisers, the facilitators and the participants.

The Idea

“My daughter was a single child. She was alone. I wanted to create a space where she could make friends” said Tirthankar Chanda, one of the oldest organisers and visionaries of the Camp. May be he also wanted a space where friendship can be creative. Being a theatre worker he wondered whether theatre provide a space for creative friendship. Dr. Chanda, being a teacher had some experience of dealing with children of different backgrounds. After

¹⁶⁰At the age of 9.

¹⁶¹This is a term coined by feminist writer Patricia Hill Collins to describe her experiences as a black woman in a white male dominated society.

quitting his job in 1992 he joined Nandikar and was associated with its Ford Foundation Project, titled “In Search of Children’s Theatre” from 1992-1996. He had the chance there of working with slum children. Once he left Nandikar he thought of experimenting with children’s theatre in a more flexible way without any pre-determined target or structure. He found a couple of people who had similar thoughts. Sekhar Das was his associate facilitator in Nandikar’s project and he also left the programme same time. Shubhasis Ganguly¹⁶² was a co-worker with Dr. Chanda in Nandikar and he excelled in working with the children of the Calcutta Blind School, Behala. His experiences also had a profound impact on Dr. Chanda.

Dr. Chanda had met the vibrant young actor-facilitators of a group called Santipur Sanskritik through various workshops. Kaushik Chattopadhyay, Ratri Goswami (later Chattopadhyay), Palan Kundu, Jayanta Bandopadhyay were the four main pillars of the group at that time who found this idea of experimenting with children’s theatre appealing partly because their group had a children’s section whom they regularly worked with and partly because they themselves joined theatre really young.

Dr. Chanda had written a book titled “Shishunatyer Sondhane”¹⁶³ which was published in 1998_ which caused his meeting with Pinaki Guha, the coordinator of Chetla Krishti Samsad, a children’s theatre group. They had some difference of opinion initially but ended up being colleagues. Another personality was Sacchidananda Chowdhury, a bank employee, a person of unbelievable enthusiasm. He searched and found Dr. Chanda after reading his book and from then has been there as a well wisher and silent organiser of the Camp.

Gopal Mallick, almost a legend in a Ranaghat¹⁶⁴, devoted his entire life in doing and organising theatre. He met these people when he was already over seventy but that did not stop him to be one of the most enthusiastic organisers. Due to his old age and ill health he could not come to the Camp every year but his presence was always felt as he sent his commanders to help and organise the workshop. Till his death in 2008 he was a great advisor.

There are innumerable people Dr. Chanda¹⁶⁵ mentions who had influenced him in various ways in thinking of children’s theatre as a medium of creating relations. The Camp is

¹⁶²He was one of the founders of the renowned theatre group, the “Blind Opera”. Currently he is working as a freelancer in the field of theatre and is associated with “Onyo Desh” a theatre group of blind people.

¹⁶³The title can be translated as ‘In search of children’s theatre’.

¹⁶⁴Ranaghat is a small town of West Bengal, situated in the Nadia district.

¹⁶⁵Talking Tirthankar Chanda in such a detail is in no way to suggest that he was the main organiser of the Camp. His figure is used as a reference point and in the due course of the chapter other organizers would also be talked about.

organised in different places every year which enriched the workshop with people having varied skills who would have otherwise remained unknown. People joined the Camp, some of them stayed and some left for various reasons but they left an impact on the process of the workshop, relationships with them lasted beyond the Camp. Arun Sen, Bula Sen, Reba Sen, Sanjib Mitra, Sameer Chakraborty, teachers of the schools where the Camp was organised¹⁶⁶, Binod Manna, Joydeep Biswas, Banani Chakrabarty, Bidisha Ghosh, Bhaskar Chakraborty... the list may go on. It is interesting to note that most of the organisers of the Camp come from a middle class, educated background which impacts the way the Camp is viewed and conducted. The idea of the Camp was conceptualised by a small homogeneous group of people who could afford the luxury to engage with such an experimental practice. Many of them had experience of working with children from the lower rung of the society and therefore these children, their way of viewing the world, their theatre had influenced the facilitators both ideally and practically. They felt responsible to ensure creative development of these children. They were the first generation organisers. Later people from the lower rungs of the society- slum dwellers, women of red light areas etc- got associated with the Camp but mostly indirectly¹⁶⁷. Their presence impacts the process but they are not present themselves. This indicates at two facts, firstly, middle class monopoly over the realm of ideas and secondly, inaccessibility of the ideas that originate in the lower strata of the society from a middle class stand point.

The first group of organisers¹⁶⁸ had certain basic ideas in common when they were conceptualising the Camp as a residential workshop. All of them believed in theatre as a means of expression and specifically children's theatre as a mode of communication. These people had the experience of working with children coming from various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and their primary idea was to create a space where an exchange of practices of various ways of doing theatre with children can be possible. They wished to envision the best possible way of working with children which would maximize the potential of creativity and confidence amongst the participating children. Organisers like Kaushik Chattopadhyay, Jayanta Banerjee, Polan Kundu, Ratri Goswami (later Chattopadhyay) had joined theatre really early age and they learnt the techniques of children's theatre through practical experience. For Dr. Chanda the learning process was an amalgamation of his own experiences and his reading from the books. He read about how theatre can be a medium of

¹⁶⁶Appendix 1 lists the name of the schools.

¹⁶⁷ As parents of the children, local people etc.

¹⁶⁸The names which are mentioned earlier.

learning from Tony Jackson, how can through 'dialogue' the criticality of a person be nourished as Paulo Freire says, how the minds of the children are colonized by the education system ensuring the sustenance of the status quo and how it is possible through theatre, an educative practice, to counter it from Brecht, Boal, Makiguchi, Postman and Weingartner, Gijubhai Badheka, Tetsuko Kuroyanagi etc. He also had to practically verify theatre's claim of being able to heal the trauma a person experienced as says Sue Jennings, and finally what should be the ideal situation for a child's personality to flourish, how should they be truly educated, 'conscientized' following Freire and Rabindranath Tagore. For him therefore another objective of the Camp was to check the validity and applicability of the theories of children's theatre in the context of West Bengal and discover the necessary shifts in the ways of viewing the same.

While these two factors were working in the background, two other issues were very overtly spoken about. Firstly, in the Camp an application of the idea of collective living needed to be practiced and the core of any relationship would be non-hierarchical friendship where ascribed features like age or social status would not bias the interactions. One large commonality amongst the organisers was what Dr. Chanda termed as 'humanity'; a wish to do something constructive which they thought would be good for a larger population. From the very beginning it was clear to the organisers that the Camp is not a way of building career or taking a benevolent stand but to do something for themselves by doing it for others. While Tirthankar Chanda and Jayanta Banerjee had a history of engagement with Left politics which made them believe in a collaborative way of living ideologically, for Ratri, Polan and Sekhar it was more like an idealistic challenge which they wanted to meet through theatre. It is critically significant to examine the inherent difference between an 'ideological' and an 'idealistic' position. Dr. Chanda was very pertinent to bring many theatre groups and children of various socio-cultural settings together because his political commitment had taught him that the most humanitarian, radical, progressive thoughts had often fallen in the pit of sectarianism which not only limited its scope but also reduced its appeal to the people. Consequently these ideas fail to find worthy carriers and became obsolete.

Beyond the technicalities of how to do children's theatre the larger aim was to share the perception of life, how one can use the creative time of one's life. Since all of the organisers were people from the field of theatre they chose this particular art form to execute their thoughts and beliefs. The reason behind mentioning the fact that theatre was a choice was to indicate that the organisers were not hoping to produce brilliant actors, directors and stunning

productions from this workshop rather they aimed at initiating the making of sensitive and creative human beings. Theatre was a means to reach the end and not an end in itself. The goal was to create a space for collective creativity.

Collective creativity as Ernst Fischer (Fisher 1959) said, precedes individual creativity. An artist needs at least another person to communicate and share her/his art with; it simply cannot be there alone. Unbiased appreciation and evaluation of art is only possible where factors like competition for catching the eye of the market and making profit does not loom over the objective of sharing one's thoughts. For this the organisers of the Camp visualised the creation of a cooperative space where the unhealthy competition of being the best by pushing others down the cliff if necessary was rejected for collaborative activities. In support and safety, they believed the best creative faculty of an imaginative person can flourish and children need that space more than the adults because what they realized is "[I]n the contemporary context [of having power to assert one's authority], children perhaps suffer the most... in the face of inequality and discrimination our culture tends to turn black wall of incomprehension to their pain, humiliation and shame." (Rutherford 1990) The necessity was to know what the children want to say about themselves and not be said to, for and about all the time. It was as if the organisers wanted to see themselves and their realities from the eyes of the children of different kinds.

This purpose triggered the procedure in which the organisers structured the Camp.

The 'What'

If it is asked: 'What is the Camp?' the brief answer would be it is a residential workshop where through play making and collective living, instilling community ethos amongst the participants is aimed for.

Shishu Kishore Bikash Mela is a workshop that takes place every year after the Durga Pujas i.e. early or mid October. It is a seven days¹⁶⁹ workshop where children and adolescents from various parts of the Bengal come and stay together and try to do theatre. At first the Camp used to start one day after the Lakshmi Puja and finish before the Diwali. Due to the shortening of the puja vacation school spaces not readily available, the workshop schedule -

¹⁶⁹In 1998, the first year Camp was organized for 11 days. Many of the participants felt sick due the weather and it was decided to end the workshop on the ninth day. From the next year one week is scheduled for the Camp.

for the last six years- commences two days after Bijoya Dashami¹⁷⁰. This rescheduling managed the problem but created a new one. Now the Lakshmi Puja comes in between the Camp and some of the participants have to go back for one night which creates a break. On the other hand it also happened that local people, seeing the kids, got so excited about the workshop that they sent *prasad*¹⁷¹ for the participants.

Throughout the year the organisers look for school spaces to host the Camp. Once a school is selected everybody is informed about it. Some of the organisers then go to the school to talk to the authority and check if all the necessary factors are available. Factors they look for include water supply, numbers of usable bathrooms, distance from train and/bus route, distance from local hospital and police station, if the area is peaceful both in terms of nature and social environment etc. This Camp is different from those in the war-zones and trauma camps where theatre of 'relief' and 'reconciliation' is practised (Thompson 2009). The context is different so is the approach of theatre. Here the focus is not so much on healing the wounds- nonetheless it can happen- rather it is to prepare individuals to form collectives so that the forces which create those wounds can be countered.

Though the term 'Camp' induces a different image for many, i.e. living outdoor in makeshift camps, it actually takes place in a school building. A day before the Camp some of the organisers arrive at the school to clean the rooms, bathrooms, making provision for the kitchen, arranging the eating space, making provisional bathrooms if necessary etc. Most of the participants come a night before the workshop. It takes a night to settle down so that from the next morning the workshop can begin.

Though making theatre is the primary activity here a couple of other practices like morning walk, music session, cleaning the school/periphery, making puppets, handicrafts etc are included.

A standard routine of the activities of the Camp is given below. For the last couple of years this routine has been the core structure though adjustments were made when necessary.

¹⁷⁰The Dassera in north India. The day when the idol of goddess Durga is submerged in the water.

¹⁷¹ The food offering to the deity.

Day	6-6:30	6:30-7:30	8-9:30	10-12:30	3:30-4:30	6:30-9	10-12
1	Getting ready	Morning walk, music session	Play making	Play making	Play making	Play making	discussion
2	Getting ready	Morning walk, music session	Play making	Play making	Play making	Play making	discussion
3	Getting ready	Morning walk, music session	Play making	Play making	Play making/Akhra	Play making	Discussion
4	Getting ready	Cleaning the school	Play making	Play making	Go as you like	Play making	discussion
5	Getting ready	Morning walk, music session	Play making	Play making	Performing out	Performing out	discussion
6	Getting ready	Morning walk, music session	Play making	Kutum katam	Play making	Play making	discussion
7	Getting ready	Rehearsing the songs	Play making	Play making	Final day performance	Final day performance	

7:30-8 – tea break

9:30-10- breakfast

12:30-3:30- lunch break

4:30-6:30- free hours for play, Tiffin.

Nearly by around 8 p.m. the working with the children ends. They can have their dinner and take rest or make the handwritten wall paper that comes out every morning. The organisers arrange their dinner. From roughly 10 p.m. the organisers sit to discuss the work, done that day with the facilitators analyse the problems and try to find solutions.

There is no watertight segmentation of the working schedule though. One can continue doing something even when the schedule for it is over. Often discussions are continued in search of a workable resolution and work schedule gets adjusted. The reason behind this flexible structure is that sudden break not only hinders one from seeing the complete picture, the effects of an activity along with its path of occurrence, but also unresolved questions keep on coming back in a practise based field. While working with children it is necessary to listen to their questions attentively and try to figure an answer along with them. The facilitators need to have solid understanding of their work for that. If found incapable of answering a child's question the wisest way a facilitator can approach this is to acknowledge the failure and ask the children to look for a solution. Discussion with more experienced facilitators is of utmost importance in case the young facilitators are unable to manage an assigned work.

The activities mentioned in the routine are elaborated further below:

1. Morning walk: The Camp day starts with morning walk. Due to the large number of the participants groups were made and in each group at least one local person – child or an adult- is kept who can guide the team. The group goes for a walk and on their way they sing. This is often the first interaction of the participants of the Camp with the local people. One target on this morning walk is to know the locality, its people and history which could later be used in the play. For instance, in the fifth year the Camp was organised in Gobardanga¹⁷² and the place is close to Narkelberiya where the historic figure Titumir¹⁷³ rebelled against the colonial rulers. He built a *bansher kella*¹⁷⁴ to fight against the British but could not match the colonial power. The warships of the British came through the local river Yamuna and destroyed the fort. This river is in a terrible condition now being half dried and half covered with water hyacinth. In the play that year Titumir and the river played pivotal roles.
Another cause of the morning walk is to see the nature and know it, if possible. Children coming from rural areas have immense knowledge about the trees, animals, birds which participants of the urban areas lack. This sharing increases the confidence of the former and acknowledgement from the latter.
2. Cleaning the school/periphery: Once or twice during the Camp the entire school building is cleaned. First few years the participants also cleaned the periphery of the

¹⁷²A small town of West Bengal, situated in the 24 parganas (N).

¹⁷³Original name Mir Nishad Ali (1782-1831).

¹⁷⁴A bamboo fort.

school; however, cleaning the school itself seems a huge task now. The underlying reasons are firstly, keeping the space clean for smooth work, cleaning for the last day performance when guests come, through physical labour and working together establish friendship, create relationship with the people of the locality.

3. Music session: every day half an hour in the morning is devoted for music session. The primary target here is to equip the children with certain songs that the organisers believe express their aspirations and dreams. New songs are also composed almost every year considering often the locality and his history. Old songs are also practised. Today the repertoire comprises 30 songs; many of them are of Rabindranath Tagore's while others are from varied sources¹⁷⁵. These songs often act as the reaffirmation of relationships established in the Camp. Often a handful of participants, when they meet due to some other occasion enjoy singing these songs which reasserts their friendship. These songs are chosen carefully considering their message and tune. Achieving perfection is not the point rather it is to share the experience and encourage one to believe that s/he can sing.
4. Akhra: it is like having different stalls of various activities in different parts of the school on one evening. Participants get divided into groups- children and adults- as their choice and take charge of different activities like dance, music, recitation, bonfire etc. There is even a ghost room where the room is kept dark and the people in charge arrange for light and sound with the material available in the Camp. Akhra started in the tenth year when the Camp was organised in Bolpur. Like a fair, things happen simultaneously and people who are not in charge of any room can roam around. Anyone can join any group anytime here. The reason behind doing this was primarily fun but gradually it also showed the level of imagination both in conceptualising and executing an idea by the children. Moreover, this is the reaffirmation of the fairground feature of the Camp.
5. Jemon Khushi Sajo: one afternoon is devoted to a 'go as you like' where initially everybody took part. Gradually it was realized that the relatively older ones are stealing the space from the children because often their ideas were catchier and dresses showier. Therefore from the last year this activity was kept only for the children, which made the senior ones unhappy. After the discussion that night with the older organisers it was decided that from next year the children would perform

¹⁷⁵Appendix 2 lists the songs of the Camp.

first but then the seniors would also get a chance to dress up and act. The necessary make up and dress are arranged from whatever is available like mount board, *kajal*, lipstick, *dupatta*, over sized dresses etc.

6. *Kutum Katam*: during the morning walk everybody is asked to collect things like a broken branch, a coloured bottle, ribbon etc, things that are wastes. One entire day they make various things using them. These are put as exhibits on the day of the programme for the visitors. The term *Kutum Katam* was coined by Abanindranath Tagore who elaborated the term as making the *katam* i.e. the wood a *kutum* i.e. relative. This started in the eleventh year.
7. *Kichir Michir*: it is a wall magazine that was put on the wall every morning. The writing, painting, editing, designing everything was done by the children. This started coming out in the sixth year. Initially it was supervised by the senior participants but now it is completely done by the children who do everything from writing, collecting, designing and putting up the paper.
8. *Performing out*: normally the evening of the fifth day is kept for the participants to go out with the performances they had made in four days. Participants are divided into groups according to their age and they develop plays. These groups go to different places to cover as much audience as possible. With their performances they invite the local people to come on the last day to see the final performances.
9. *Final performance*: on the seventh day the entire school is decorated for the final performance. The show starts at 3o'clock in the afternoon. The reasons behind starting so early are that the programme list is usually quite long and some of the participants return on that very night. After the performance, lights are switched off, candles are given to everybody and every person present is invited to join in the song, "Aguner Poroshmoni". This was the last ceremony marking the end of the Camp for that year. This is a very poignant moment; most of the people become emotional some of them cry and console each other.

There are some activities which are not done every year but were done in certain years. In the second Camp, Saumen Guha came to teach basics of playing flute which was incorporated in the play that year. In the sixth the Camp was organised in Jhargram, a town in West Midnapore. Tarini Mahato, a local Chhau performer guided the participants through the basics of Chhau and also made Chhau masks with paper-mache. Five girls performed on the final day wearing these masks. Next year SanjibMitra of Jhargram Art Academy came with

the idea and materials to make *patas*¹⁷⁶. He had the story in mind and the outlines of the images printed. The paper scrolls are then pasted on cloth strips according to the standard procedure and then the participants coloured it. Bani, Qutub and Titul wrote the song of the *pata*¹⁷⁷. It was performed on the final day.

It is interesting to see how the local and folk performance practices penetrate the repertoire of the Camp. The target here is not to learn these forms as they are learnt traditionally and incorporate them in the performances and claim an authentic indigenous identity. Rather absorption of the aesthetics of these forms is aimed for so that the small nuances like the body movements from Chhau, the alignments of figures from a traditional *pata*, the rhythm of a folk song etc can be incorporated in the performances.

In the second, third, fourth, fifth and ninth year Sanjib Mitra and Sameer Chakraborty taught how to make hand puppets, small rod puppets and masks. In the eighth year making a simple puppet just by twisting paper and tying it with strings was taught. A play was done with this puppet, commonly called *Poltu Putul*. On the sixth year a brief introduction to origami was arranged.

All the activities¹⁷⁸, mentioned, have one feature in common; all of them aim at viewing an individual from different angles, her/his abilities, skills, passions etc. It is a path of discovery because often people do not have any idea what they are capable of and what their shortcomings are. Discovering both the skills and loopholes in one's character through a collaborative process enables the involved one to share and help with one's skill and learn from others without facing any humiliating situation.

The Camp being a residential one has one big advantage and that is the participants get a lot more time to spend with each other and the organisers than they would have in case of non-residential ones. This enables the establishment of friendship through working together. The participants spend so much time together not only while developing plays but also during their leisure hours, preparing and having food, bathing etc. Beyond the play making period organisers work with the children equally hard, arrange their meals, take care of them thus creating a bond stronger than just a facilitator-participant one. The leisure hours are deliberately given especially to the children so that they can share their life experiences with

¹⁷⁶*Patras* are narrative scrolls with images on them. Showing the *pata* and singing the story is an age old tradition of Bengal.

¹⁷⁷Appendix 3 lists scripts of two of the puppet plays and the *pater gaan*.

¹⁷⁸Appendix 4 consists of some images to give an idea about some of these activities.

each other. A free zone of interaction often bestows the Camp with brilliant ideas manifested in the play making, wall magazine etc. A child gets the opportunity to view the entirety of the Camp and thus enjoys the chance of choosing a task s/he likes the most, like helping in cooking, cleaning utensils, cleaning the rooms etc. This seven days of co-existence elevates that the Camp to a higher level than just a theatre workshop.

In order to have a better grasp at how the work is actually done in the Camp the various roles associated with the Camp needs to be discussed. In the first three four years of the Camp the number of the participants was less than seventy five therefore it was possible for three four facilitators to work with them in separate groups. Amongst these facilitators were mostly the first generation organisers, Tirthankar Chanda, Kaushik Chattopadhaya, Polan Kundu, Jayanta Bannerjee, Ratri Chattopadhyay¹⁷⁹ and some upcoming facilitators like Samit Bandopadhyay, Mukesh Bandopadhyay, Nirupom Bhattacharya etc. On the fifth year the number of the participants became so huge and a sizable portion of it was the adolescents which compelled the organisers to make a big division. A new group appeared, the *Mejo* i.e. those who are in the middle and the children were started to be called the *Chhoto* i.e. the little ones. From the fifth year some of the *Mejos* began to act as associate facilitators with the older ones. They were the first generation of the Camp produced facilitators. Many of them today act as independent ones. On the eighth year the two of the oldest *mejoes* were given the responsibility to work with the adolescents while the organisers continued working with the children. These two *mejoes*- Amolesh Pramanik and Suchetana Chanda- failed miserably in developing the play and finally Kaushik Chattopadhyay had to take up the job. What they learnt from the experience was firstly, not to impose an idea and secondly not to construct the play in their heads but to let it be constructed with the participants. That was the first year when the *mejoes* were given the responsibility of being facilitators. One reason behind this is to train the *mejoes* into facilitation; another one was to keep them engaged so that the older facilitators can concentrate on the children.

The number of the *mejoes* kept on increasing to such an extent that it was not enough to engage them as facilitators. Till the eleventh year the *mejoes* continued to facilitate and create a play of their own in the leisure hour but that year the number was so much that two groups were made within the *mejoes*. One group would only facilitate the children and would not perform and the other group would do the workshop under an invited theatre worker,

¹⁷⁹From now on this group of people would be referred to as the organizers while the *mejoes* would be termed as facilitators if not mentioned otherwise.

Shubhasis Ganguly and perform on the final day. The former group was given a new name, *Master Mejo* while the latter continued with the old name. These *master mejos* were quite dissatisfied with the choice that they had to make and finally they also put up a performance on the final day.

As the number of the participants accelerated, necessity of people for the managerial tasks also increased. A group of skilled participants took up this job. They are always so busy ensuring the smooth functioning of the Camp that they could not perform. On the tenth year one of the wittiest members of this group, Amolesh, said that they are the *Pandeler Bansh*¹⁸⁰, a term which became so popular that these group started to be called by this name.

These are the various terms which are used in the Camp to refer to different groups of people. The reason behind describing these classifications is firstly, to be able to give a sense how the work is organised in the Camp. These classifications gradually were formed according to the necessity of the Camp and were not pre-determined. On one hand the distribution of the work makes the efficiency of the people engaged in those particular job increases. A person who was working with the children one year may chose to do managerial chores next year and s/he is free to do that. This ensures her/his expertise in more than one area. Thus an individual can acquire skills necessary for facilitation, management and organisation which make her/him an all-rounder, capable of doing any job. This classification also ensures the smooth functioning of the Camp as the participant are told on the very first day whom to talk to if they have a problem. For instance, Sujata Goswami and Bithika Saha manage medical necessities, Amitava, Koushik, Raju are to be informed if one needs something from the market, Sameer Chakraborty handles the craft section, Sekhar Das is to be contacted for safe keeping of the valuables etc. Secondly, this classification allows referring these names from now on without having to clarify them repeatedly.

Not only the structuring of the processes but the themes of the plays reflect the basic ideas of the Camp, collaborativeness, friendship, ability of human beings to overcome their limitations, necessity of imagination and hope for a better future. A brief description of the plays would elaborate this further. It was necessary, however, to mention here that every year more than one play is developed and performed on the final day. First two years the number of participants was small therefore only one play was made where everybody took

¹⁸⁰The bamboo pole of a pandal. When a pandal is made the bamboo structure forms its core but most of the admiration is taken by the design of the structure and the bamboo poles are overlooked. He used the term to indicate a position where they work hard do not get mush of the lie light.

part. From the third year a trend of developing more than one plays and performing them on the final day became the practise. There would be two-three skits by the children and one grand play in the end where everyone including the organisers would take part. From fifth year due to the number of the participants the skits were developed by the children and the grand play included mostly the *mejors* but children also had collective roles, for instance, characters of a group of villagers, school students, soldiers, colours of the rainbow etc.

1. *Moner Manush* (1998) - the play was about a vagabond who befriends children of various socio-economic backgrounds, who come to play in a park. He tells them stories of great adventures, triumph of humanity against all odds. The parents are sceptical about their kids mingling with the vagabond and try to prevent it only to fail. The man leaves one day, leaving behind his stories of a place where friendship prevails over competition and violence. The anticipation of the journey is the legacy he leaves behind.

This story reflects the desire of the children to have friends to share their emotions and experiences. Apparently a simple wish, the real world of arbitrary social barriers requires a messiah like the vagabond, who does not belong to any specific social strata and hence symbolizes a divide-less society. He thus becomes their 'Moner Manush', literally "man of the heart".

2. *Joyee* (1999) - a calm and quite village life where people coexisted with nature peacefully for ages till they come into confrontation with the king. The king wanting to build a palace evicts the people, and destroys nature. Finally a little boy supported by the villagers start a protest and blinds the king with his catapult.

The figure of the tyrannical king is commonly used as the representation of an oppressive system. The notion of the 'palace' being an image of luxury and grandeur stands starkly in contrast to the simple life of the village. Blinding the king is also a common symbol of loss of power. This play narrates the story of a utopia where everything good is placed as a binary against the king, the embodiment of the 'bad'. This is a rather simplistic portrayal but the basic message that this play wants to spread, the defeat of all oppressive system is inevitable if the oppressed stand together.

3. *Ruddhodhara* (2000) – Situated in the year of a terrible flood in Bengal, the play reflected the trauma. The narrative was around the building of a dam on the river,

where nobody listened to the old villagers who warned that nature would take revenge. The dam collapses and sweeps away the nearby villages once that rains start, exposing the truth behind all the stories of corruption and faulty material used in the dam. The survivors were brought to a shelter where their distress unites them and they encourage each other to start a life again being more concerned about nature.

Sujata, still remembers one dialogue of the contractor of the dam, “*Bhat chhorale kaker obhab hoy na*”¹⁸¹. He decides to hire cheap labour from outside symbolizing the unbalanced relation between supply and demand. This play was the first example of a narrative which addressed politics and power plays. The play was done using the entire school building which later became a trend. It talks about the possible victory of life over man inflicted calamities, if people stand together.

4. Ramdhonu (2001) – In this play a lonely child wishes to befriend the rainbow. Everybody mocks her and gives her advice to stop dreaming in the realm of the absurd and concentrate on her career. On a rainy afternoon when she is almost convinced about the impossibility of her dreams the rainbow comes to her. After chatting for a while the rainbow goes back to the sky to shine bright and assure other children who still dreams of meeting the rainbow someday.

If believing in one’s dreams is the principal message of the play the other would be a realization that the real precious elements cannot be owned personally. They are for everybody if one can wish for it truly.

5. Titumir (2002) – The theme centres on a group of school kids come for an excursion to a town near a river. One of the students leaves his team to meet an old fisherman who tells him the story of the place. The glorious days of the river, the barges of the *zamindars* floating on it, the zamindar being entertained by the court singers etc appear in front of the student’s eyes. Gradually the play tells the story of Titumir’s rebellion against the oppressive colonial rule and his defeat. By the end of his journey the student starts perceiving the place differently.

The stories collected from the local people and oral traditions implicated the terrible condition of the river Yamuna . The play did not have any great message but an urge to know and tell one’s history of the past.

¹⁸¹It’s a Bengali proverb literally meaning, crows will come in bulk if rice is scattered.

6. Jatra (2003) – As the name suggests, a traveller moves across time and space in search of peace and light. He meets a little girl who joins him in his journey. Together they witness the violence of human civilization caused in the name of power, religion, security. After every incident of destruction some choose to continue the journey towards hope and better future and some to stay back. Both of them face the wrath of time. However, the journey needs to be continued because when a journey is made there is at least a hope.

The crux of this highly stylized performance could be summarized into one sentence, '*Jatra korle tobu sombhobona jage*'¹⁸². This is one of the core beliefs of the Camp, represented in this play. For the people who witnessed the performance and those who heard about it, this particular line has attained a cultic status justifying the existence of the Camp.

7. Desh (2004) – The Camp was organised in a school which is actually situated in 'no man's land' between India and Bangladesh. For many of the organisers the Partition was an incomprehensible trauma. The play represented this fragmentation of a country, the resulting mass migration and the condition of the people. A man stood in a utopic space between two countries and wished that the wire fences would be lifted one day.

The play ends with children from both sides of the performance space, indicating two countries, flying kites which do not obey any dividing line. It is a representation of the wish fulfilment. During the course of the play the organisers discussed with the participants various aspects of the Partition and read a few articles on that event. This play also was a reclaiming of one's past.

8. Bongobhongo (2005) - Remembering the historical event of partition of Bengal in 1905, the centenary of Bongobhongo¹⁸³ formed the core of the play that year. The play narrated in bits the stories of young rebels like Khudiram, their sacrifice for their country and their dreams of freedom.

A claim of the past and celebration of the unity was the base of the play.

¹⁸²If the journey is made a hope exists.

¹⁸³In 1905 the Viceroy of India Lord Curzon declared a partition of Bengal. The reason government gave was better administration but the original one was to throttle the revolutionary activities in Bengal. The entire nation burst in anger against this dictum. On the face of nationwide protest the decision was withdrawn in 1911 and Bengal was reunited. This partition planted the seed of 1947 partition.

9. Moy (2006) – The play tells the story of Moy¹⁸⁴, the native architect who built the Indraprastha palace for the Pandavas. Pandavas burnt the forest of Khandava with all its inhabitants to please the god of fire. Moy was an inhabitant of the forest too but was accidentally saved with his father. After the destruction his father, the old man takes up the responsibility of telling the world how brutally the rulers devastated their lives and was never punished for that. Moy chooses to hide himself under the security of the royal hands and joins the Pandava camp. He gradually realizes that his creativity is dying under the censorship of the rulers. While he moans his decision his father continues his art of sculpture representing the violence.

The ruling royalties, their pact with other bodies of power, sacrificing common people for the interest of the powerful-were the focus of the play and . This happens everywhere and the solution is not to save oneself by taking shelter under the power but to voice against it- is the message this play carries.

10. Hansulibanker Upokotha and Bisarjan (2007)- The Camp was organised in Jamboni, Bolpur that year, a place known for its two great literary figures, Tarashankar Bandopadhyay (1898-1971) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). The play was devised this year combining two iconic works of these figures, Hansulibanker Upokotha, a novel by Bandopadhyay and Bisarjan, play by Tagore. These two texts have certain features in common, age old superstition choking the voice of logic and humanity, inhuman practices prevailing in the name of tradition etc. The facilitator of this play Subhashis Ganguly found similarities between Raghupati and Banshi, the voice of tradition, Joysingha and Karali, embodiment of new thoughts and between Pakhi and Aparna, two humane characters, innocent, victims of the situation.

Detailed analysis of these two texts was done as the play was made. For many of the participants that was the first exposure to these texts.

11. Bhalomanush (2008)- the play was the Camp version of Bertolt Brecht's "Good Person of Szechwan". One of the eminent theatre groups of Kolkata, Nandikar did an adaptation of this play in 1974. They also named it the same.

¹⁸⁴ Moy is mentioned as a Danava or demon, in the Mahabharata who built the magnificent place for the Pandavas in Indraprastha.

How can an honest person survive alone if the entire world is corrupt? Brecht asked this question in his play which is yet to find an answer. This question however, justifies the existence on an endeavour like the Camp which aims at individual creative enrichment along with mutually collaborative struggle for a better future.

12. Prometheus (2009)- The play told the story of Prometheus who stole fire from the gods for the enlightenment of human beings. Denouncing the control of fate and making one's own future is one line of the story. The other is the risk taken for what one believes in and be prepared to suffer for it eternally. The dauntless spirit of Prometheus who does not succumb to divine pressures is an ideal rebel, a future hero.
13. Chaitanya (2010)- the Camp was organised in Bidyanagar, near Nabadwip, a town that owes its name to the mythical story that Sri Chaitnya¹⁸⁵ used to come here as a kid to learn, to acquire *bidya*¹⁸⁶. Chaitanya was the core character of the play not as an *avatar* but as a mundane human being who showed the downtrodden people of the society the path of love to attain the company of the beloved lord. His down to earth version of religion struck the oppressive Hindu Brahmanism hard but the upper caste Hindus could not crush him brutally because Chaitanya had a huge number of followers. They therefore followed another strategy, separated Chaitanya from his followers, made him disappear¹⁸⁷, put him on a pedestal and made him a god far from the people.

The underlying lesson was that if one becomes too dangerous for any oppressive system, it tries to win her/him over, crush her/him brutally or glorify her/him so much that the person gets detached from the soil, the people. As a creative person it is necessary to be able to detect both the strategies and survive against it.

14. Surjer Siri (2011)- once a huge fight started between *Badal raj*, the king of the clouds and *Surjo*, the sun regarding their dominance over the sky in which the former defeated the latter and broke his chariot. The earth suffered grimly as the sun could not rise. Mother Nature then asked the plants to give colours and built a stair with it. The sun climbed down the stair after the rain and thus the rainbow was born.

¹⁸⁵ A 16th century Bhakti saint of Bengal.

¹⁸⁶ Knowledge.

¹⁸⁷ Chaitanya was probably killed by the *pandas* of the Jagannath Temple, Puri though no concrete evidence was found.

It was a simple fairy tale describing a fantasy. In this play after seven years children took major part¹⁸⁸ as stars, water bubbles, and soldiers for the cloud king.

15. Muktodhara (2012) - the plan was to adapt Rabindranath Tagore's play Muktodhara. An invited facilitator worked with the *mejors* along with Polan Kundu to develop the play. However, this play could not be performed due to heavy shower.

In terms of thematic these plays cover a vast ground including political, economic and social issues, environmental concern, ideas of the future, oral narratives, folk forms, history, subaltern identities, fairy tales etc. Often these themes overlap in a play. A chart is given

Thematic	Plays
Political, economic, social issues	Joyee, Ruddhodhara , Desh, Bongobhongo, Hansulibanker Upokotha and Bisorjon, Bhalomanush, Muktodrama
Environment	Joyee, Rudhhodhara, Mukhtodhara
Ideas of the future	Moner Manush, Jatra, Chaitanay
Oral narratives	Titumir, Moy, Prometheus
Folk forms	Jatra, Moy, Chaitanya
History	Titumir, Desh, Bongobhongo,
Subaltern identities	Moy
Fairy tales	Ramdhonu, Surjer Siri

above to show this variety at a glance.

There are several other plays done in these fifteen years in the Camp ranging from folk tales to sci-fi. One amongst it is worth mentioning. In the fourth year of the Camp the children developed a skit, titled "*Noon-er daame*"¹⁸⁹. A boy invites his friends to his birthday party. After celebration when food was served the guests realize that there is no salt in the food. There was no salt in the house. They go to the local grocery and there was no salt either. They gradually go to the retailers, the factories, and the port where ships arrive carrying salt but such a trivial thing as salt could not be found. They through the process realize the amount of labour invested to produce salt. The value of salt increases for them and for the

¹⁸⁸Last time they did in 2003 after that the last play was mostly dominated by the *mejors* with children playing minor roles.

¹⁸⁹ Literally this means 'at the price of salt'

viewers as well. The execution was not exceptional but the idea was brilliant especially while coming from kids not older than twelve.

The ideas of freedom, dreams, friendship, overcoming obstacles which are so prevalent in the plays also find their way in the process of play making.

The “How”

The themes of the plays done in the Camp reflect the beliefs and ideas that are cherished in the workshop. They also get reflected in the process of playmaking, the process which is given more importance than the performance. It would be a hoax if a play about freedom and imagination is made through a dogmatic process. A play about crossing barriers and creating an inclusive space should not be done through an exclusionary method. The children realises the falsity soon and because they have no vested interest, unlike the adults, they can question this pretension¹⁹⁰. Their disbelief about the entire process betrays the goal of the workshop.

There are two broad ways in which a play can be done; one is ‘starting a play’ where the facilitator or the director has an idea in mind, s/he shares it with the participants, moderations are made if necessary and then the rehearsal starts. The other way is when the facilitator(s) comes with a relatively empty mind knowing only the structure of the warm up sessions and then tries to develop a story with the participants. The second process being more open ended is far more risky but it is interesting too because sometimes the participants come up with ideas beyond the expectation of the facilitator(s). A skilled facilitator tends to adapt an amalgamation of these two processes where s/he is open to new ideas and suggestions but also has an idea in mind as a backup plan. A skilled facilitator can bring the ideas out of a participant without imposing on them. This task is more critical in case of children because they being very sensitive could feel the slightest hint of domination to which they either succumb and obey or disagree to the extent of hampering the entire process.

How to engage the participating children in the play making process is one crucial question every facilitator has to ponder over. In a group of children coming from varied social backgrounds¹⁹¹ it is hard to find a common ground. Instead of forcing a common ground like

¹⁹⁰ Unfortunately, it is often seen in theatre practices beyond the Camp that this falsity goes by the name of good production.

¹⁹¹This is seen in many workshops including the Camp because groups are normally made according to the age of the participants, not their locality or social status.

saying, “you are all children”¹⁹², “make friends”¹⁹³ etc which the children often find imposing. The facilitator can more wisely try to listen to their stories first and give them a chance to discover if they have a common ground at all.

“Tell me a story” or even “Tell me your name”- innocent questions like this can be problematic for a child. When a child is approached individually it creates a pressure on her/him especially if s/he with people s/he does not know. Tirthankar Chanda says “Some children have names that are phonetically beautiful, stylish, for instance, Modhuchhanda. The name itself indicates the socio-cultural status. Compare it to a name like Babu, common and colourless. There are several children who have just one name, a very common one too. These kids often feel humiliated to share their names after listening to the others. This creates a barrier.” Very subtle incidents like this can create problem in building a group or a team. What can be done instead is to use a game or two to know names like ‘act me your name’ where the kid has to act the name out. The acting becomes important here, not the name. Or another game like ‘name exchange’ where the children sitting in a circle exchange her/his with the one sitting opposite. Once the exchange is done the facilitator would call the names one by one and a kid has to raise hand for her/his partner’s name. Something as personal and intimate as name, can be shared with the group as the first level of sharing. Knowing the names can be the main purpose of these games but they also initiate the bonding process amongst the children. The partnership of the play goes beyond the play.

There are several processes of developing an idea through theatre games. Participants can be divided into groups and then each group presents a still image from which the idea can be developed. The facilitator can also get from these images the kind of stories the children want to tell. Once the group have presented their images the facilitator might ask the children to connect them. The facilitator can also ask the groups to develop the image into skits. S/he can demand an analysis of the images depending on the age of the participants. Another way to build a story is that one participant would say a line and then the other would get the chance. One line at a time to build a story is a fast and effective process. Very young kids cannot follow the procedure of adding one line after another as they find it problematic to grasp the continuity. What they do in that situation is that they introduce their stock characters which they have gathered from other stories - animals, ghosts, kings etc- in the narrative and take it to a completely different direction. It is also difficult for them to limit

¹⁹²It is an often used sentence in Bengali “Tomra sobai chhoto” i.e. ‘you are all kids’.

¹⁹³ “Bondhutto kore nao.”

themselves to one sentence and the facilitator then has to be strict in stopping the kids to ensure a continuing process. It becomes easier for young kids to tell a complete story separately and not to add or edit another's story. This strategy however, might not work that successfully in case of children who are older. In their case the adding line method can be more successful because they can follow the narrative continuity, add twists and turns in the narrative, weigh between the alternative solutions and come up with critical attitude towards any simplistic resolution. This age range – from seven-eight to early teens- is a crucial period where sensitivity in a child can be easily touched and also hurt. While working with them if one's story is chosen over the others' then there is chance that those others might feel neglected and hence choose not to be involved enough with the process. As subtle a factor like this may turn into an exclusionary practice for many where one's story is selected and other's denied which the latter take as the denial of their creative agency. They may dissociate themselves from the child whose story is selected and the process as a whole both of which will affect the process.

This feeling of being neglected positively indicates the involvement of the children in the theatre making process because if they are not involved enough and are indifferent, they will not feel bad if their ideas are not incorporated. They feel bad because they want to express themselves in others' presence and wish to be appreciated. Therefore, this issue has to be handled delicately by the facilitator and one strategy to avoid this problem is to adopt the adding line method of story building where anyone can come up with a line and as it progresses each participant adds a line to the story. This process is important at two levels; firstly, this gives a sense of ownership to all the participants. It hinders the making of a 'star' at the expense of others. At another level, this paves the path of sharing. No individual participant can assert her/his monopoly over dictating the story line. By the time the tenth participant is adding her line the story could have taken a completely different path than what was thought by the first participant and in that situation she learns, probably with the support of the facilitator, not to impose her idea but to share the creative space.

It often becomes visible that children come up with side stories which they have heard somewhere else and try to stitch it with the dramatic narrative to enhance their contribution. One way of dealing with it is to tell them how their side narratives are irrelevant and does not help the progression of the chosen story anyway. Though probably it is more effective not to tell them that their side stories are irrelevant but ask them to show how they are related to the selected story line. The latter is preferable because it acts at two levels; one, it makes the

children realize themselves that their stories are pretty distant from the selected story line and does not necessitate a facilitator giving the final words and two, it trains the children to search and find narrative connections between their stories and the selected one that develops their ability to grasp continuity and think logically. Once the connection is found the children can improvise the new characters of the side stories and/nor characters from the original story line may reappear. The original story line and the side story has to have a common link like, common characters, similar messages etc. These common features are linked up and the play proceeds.

Why is this so necessary to bring out a storyline, an idea from within the participants? The reason is that they must know that it is their story, they have a right over it, and they own it, collectively. This increases their confidence, creativity and interest in the entire process. One incident is worth mentioning here. Todo was a problematic kid, he was hyper-active always talking and never listening. Initially the young facilitators had a hard time controlling him, later they made Todo in-charge of props for a play. Todo felt sick later that day. He was shaking with fever but enquiring repeatedly if the props are ready. The involvement of the participants is the first and most important hurdle a facilitator has to overcome.

This involvement which is the prerequisite of any team work can be aspired to establish through theatre games. There are different layers of these games targeted at different goals, knowing each other, building trust, collective concentration, imagination etc. In workshops where people come from different socio-economic backgrounds establishing this involvement and team spirit seems difficult. These differences at times may end up creating sharp divisions. Something as subtle as choice of words, body language, etc can make those barriers. The facilitators in this situation can either probe to extract the participation of can openly discuss the problem with the participant. This is only possible if the children are old enough to understand it. This open discussion may not succeed establishing team spirit but it initiates a process of children thinking about their differences and its significances. This as one step towards mutual collaboration is more important than simply overlooking the fact that there are differences among children and forcing them to work together.

In the Camp the trend is to improvise a play. None of the plays done in these fifteen years have scripts. No script was a pressure-releaser as there is no memorizing the lines. The participants create their own dialogues; improvise on stage without any hesitation. This

freedom from written words makes them confident and they can concentrate more on the acting than on words.

The first couple of days in the Camp focus is on the fact that a group should know itself well and games are therefore more physical where the team spirit can be built. Once this goal is achieved subtle games for concentration, imagination, image making, developing skits are scheduled. Once the plays started taking shape the time allotted for games decrease and the focus shifts to the plays though it often becomes necessary to warm up to energise the group.

Amitava Saha, one of the organisers elaborates on his experience of viewing Tirthankar Chanda working with children not more than six years old. At the very beginning the facilitator asks the children to tell stories and choose one from them. As the story is selected the facilitator asks the children what actually happens in the story i.e. what actions take place according to which scenes can be made. Once the children are able to identify separate incidents in the play characters are decided, parts distributed and the rehearsal starts.

Distributing characters amongst kids so young is a really tough task. Everybody wants to play the role which has maximum stage presence. They drag their roles on stage just to be seen. The most effective way to handle this is to allow all of them to play one role, probably the main one. When one acts the other sees and they in turn tries to incorporate the features they liked most when they are acting. They themselves can then decide who is doing it well. Thus the parts can be allotted.

This method of distributing roles has a democratic angle to it where the opinion of every child is taken into consideration and they are the ones to take the decision. The facilitator's role here is just to encourage them to engage with the discussion. S/he may also have to question the decisions the participants make not to counter them but create an obstacle which the participant have to overcome and in the process they may reach at a clearer understanding of the play and the roles.

The process where before finalising the roles, one role is done by many participants proves to be important at various levels. Firstly, participants can experiment with them and assimilate attributes they thought would be right for the character. In doing so they open up possibilities which even the facilitator could not have imagined. Secondly, as they see each other and analyse their aesthetic and critical faculty get enhanced. Thirdly, as they learn from seeing each other and not from an adult facilitator they could respect themselves and be less

dependent on the facilitator to validate their ideas. Fourthly, this method inaugurates a mirroring process where participants can see themselves through others eyes. In the Camp of 2011 Paglu, a small kid, got the role of a king. He came from a very poor family so one could say this role was a wish fulfilling one for him. But what happened deserves a deeper introspection. His was one of the most tyrannical kings as he incorporated, probably unconsciously, attributes of all those people whom he find dominating and terrorizing. Likewise, when a rich kid does the role of a beggar or vice versa, they can perceive the role and each other much better.

One major problem of rehearsing with the children is that once they know what they are to do, the lines are set, they lose interest in more rehearsals. Rakhal, a very energetic kid was once found roaming in the veranda of the school while the workshop was going on. An organiser asked him why is he not rehearsing to which he answered, “ধুস, একই পাট, রোজ রোজ একই ডায়লগ। ভালো লাগছে না।”¹⁹⁴ The job of the facilitators is also to make every part appear as new to the child actors every day otherwise they will very legitimately lose interest in saying the same lines again and again.

Coming back to Amitava’s experience, after two days working with another facilitator these really young kids were losing interest while Tirthankar Chanda took up the facilitation. He asked the children to show him the play because he does not know what it was about. The children performed for him. Once they could perform flawlessly that made them confident and the facilitator realized that the basic structure is ready, new elements can be introduced. He then asks to add particular mannerisms, a change in walking style, talking style to certain characters. He also asked some to imitate people they know well, parents, teachers, friends etc. These suggestions opened new areas for the children to work with. Thus they continued rehearsing and the play was stylized too.

What is the role of the facilitator? How far should a facilitator push the participants? What qualities a facilitator must have- these were some questions I asked during the interviews to the people who have experience of working with children. Unanimously they said that a facilitator must respect the children. Patience is another important requirement. Facilitation is learnt best through practice and here is no shortcut to it. The only thing a facilitator should aim for is to make the entire process a joyous one for the participants and devise strategies to meet up this goal. Facilitators like Rudraprasd Sengupta, Shubhasis Ganguly, Kaushik

¹⁹⁴ “The same part, same dialogue every day. Not feeling interested”

Chattopadhyay, Ratri Chatopadhyay and young facilitators like Shamit Bandopadhyay, Barnali Bandopadhyay, Swarupa Pramanik etc agreed to a point that the first criterion of play making with children is that the process must be engrossing and happy. All moral messages of social duties and responsibilities can come after that.

Last year that was a problem with one of the facilitators who was working with the *mejors*. Many of the participants found his way of doing theatre dogmatic. Some of them could even point the root of the problem as they said that the facilitator was not sharing the ideas he had in his head and kept it as privileged information. This stopped the participants from giving suggestions because they did not know the line the play is going to take. It was not therefore enough for a facilitator it seems only to listen to others suggestions but also to share his own if the participants are old enough to understand it.

A special kind of play was once very popular in the Camp, namely the half-texts. It is basically a problem posing play where a problem situation is built up and once the characters face the problem in the play the play is stopped and the audiences are asked which path the characters should take to resolve the problem. 'Price of Coal' a play done by the Coventry TIE company¹⁹⁵ was the instance that encouraged the organisers to experiment with this form in the Camp. This was first done in the seventh year of the Camp where the *mejors* did the plays and the children were the audience. The children showed unexpected and unbelievable maturity in dealing with questions like inter-caste marriages, taking up prostitution to survive, rich girl marrying poor boy etc. Two plays are worth mentioning in this context.

A half text was done on the eleventh year of the Camp by the *mejors* regarding extra-marital affair where a woman trapped in a loveless marriage was about to have an affair. This created a huge dissent among many organisers who believed that this topic should not have been presented in front of the kids. The kids however, had strong opinions about the issue. While some of them were violently against a married women being involved with another man, others supported the woman. This revealed how far the adults are ignorant of the thinking processes of children.

Another half-text which was devised in the fourteenth year of the Camp was about a poor family, members of which were starving for two days. On the third day the mother could arrange some rice. As she cooked it another man appeared at their door who said was starving

¹⁹⁵This play is referred before in the first chapter in details.

for four days. Now the rice is not enough for all. They can either choose to chase the man out and have it themselves or share but if they share then it would not be enough for anybody. For a long time no solution could be found. Suddenly a kid stands up; he has not spoken much in the previous days, and says in a tone as if it is not a problem at all, to dip the cooked rice in water. This would make the rice swollen, thus it would be heavy and enough for everybody. This lesson he learnt from his life which the play inspired him to share. In other contexts he might have concealed the fact that he has to starve often at home but in this situation his experience was not a cause for humiliation rather appreciation.

This is one way in which the structuring of 'sacrosanct knowledge' gets questioned. Lessons that are taught in schools are not the only lessons that ensure survival. Whose knowledge is glorified at the expense of whose knowledge, how far is the 'Knowledge' relevant in the lives of the people who acquire it- are questions that come along. Huge disparity of social realities necessitates different viewing of the knowledge system itself.

One might be eager enough, reading till this, that beyond these features what major ways is the Camp different from any other residential/ non-residential workshop? Before answering this it should be restated that these subtle practices are influenced by certain beliefs. Theoretically these beliefs might ask for further refinement in understanding but to view how these beliefs impact the working process of the Camp one has to look into the minute details of the organization, theatre making process and relationships in the Camp.

The unique features:

Some of the key features of the camp like staying together, helping each other, assisting in the management of the entire work process etc may automatically happen in a residential workshop. Where does then the uniqueness of the Camp lie?

What has to be made clear here is that the Camp does not claim a uniqueness rather if there are other workshop spaces operating under similar principles as the Camp, that would be regarded as a moment of solidarity with other believers of the same cause. It would add to the number of believers of a better living by being together through theatre. Yet no evidence of the existence of any such workshops except the Camp is found within the sample area.

In three major areas the Camp probably can claim being unique - the organisational pattern, the economic structure and the aspired goal.

Organisational pattern:

The Camp operates on the basis of its belief on horizontal organisation pattern and not vertical organisational structure. It allows equal rights and therefore expects everyone to share equal responsibilities. This organisational pattern is chosen not only for its moral appeal to the virtue of equality but also for its proven effectivity.

A pyramidal structure of organisation definitely has some positive aspects, with the most able person at the top, presumably, visualising and mapping the course of the organisation while the less skilled ones learn how to do so under her/his guidance. Employing skilled people may sometimes ensure the smooth functioning of the organisation and thus guaranteeing its success, or may be read in terms of a magnificent end-camp production.

Yet, this structure has couple of persisting problems. Firstly, because the structure exists over and beyond the people, associated with it, it asks the people to mould themselves according to the need of the structure and gradually adopts an irreversible rigidity on the face of which individual aspirations have to be compromised. It almost takes the form of pre-modern altruistic community where the collectivity is venerated at the expense of obliterating any individual thought and feelings.

Secondly, this vertical structure always has the alluring drive to make people wish for the top position. It initiates competition where everyone wants to be at the top. This competition is not always healthy where people try to enhance their skills and abilities and then try to be the best but they often choose the easier way of lobbying and manipulating other people to secure their place.

One may, however, question as to why does anyone try to be at the top? What special and extra does the person at the top gets which makes her/his position so attractive? It can be money, it can be fame or something as simple but as important as recognition.

Thirdly, the vertical organisational pattern necessitates obedience to and acceptance of instructions coming from the top. People holding the power in any society wishes to maintain this structure where a few will take decisions on behalf of and for others and this 'others' would accept it without arguing critically. It is a hegemony building pattern that ensures the subjugation of many- at the level of thought and action- by few.

Theatre as a collective and collaborative endeavour¹⁹⁶ ideally stands against this pattern of societal operation and therefore theatre organisations working in this pattern betray the entire purpose of the art simply conforming to the rule of the dominance in a society.

Finally, a vertical organisational pattern positions a skilled person at the top- presumably, again- and people who are less skilled are oriented along the grid. Now this allows people, parasitic in nature, just to tag along themselves around the skilled people and survive. The mere increase in size may be an indicator of success for some but in long run the conglomeration of unskilled, weak people hampers the functioning of the organisation. Sharing ideas for validity checking ceases to be an imperative and the ability to conform acquires higher value. These tagging along people hinder the functioning of the organisation and waste their potentiality as they realise that simple obedience and conformity will be enough to guarantee their survival and lose interest in acquiring skills.

Quoting Antonio Gramsci, “All men are intellectuals... non intellectuals do not exist.”(Quintin Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith 1971, 2005) Everybody has intellectuality of some sort. It is not possible that a person knows nothing. Whether this knowledge is given the status of ‘knowledge’, something worth knowing, in a society or not is the crucial question here. There is a common proverb “মূর্খের জ্ঞান মূর্খের, জ্ঞানীরজ্ঞানজ্ঞানীরজ্ঞানীর। মূর্খের জ্ঞানওজ্ঞান, জ্ঞানীরজ্ঞানওজ্ঞান”¹⁹⁷. Any knowledge ensuring survival of the one who has it- drawing from Postman and Weingartner- can rightfully be called knowledge. However, institutional validation remains a crucial factor. Moreover, skills and knowledge are so varied that there can be no universal, general yardstick to discern what is worth naming ‘knowledge’ and what is not. They are different organically therefore there can be no superior-inferior categorization, no vertical aligning of skills rather they must be acknowledged to coexist horizontally. This necessitates horizontal organizational pattern.

In a horizontal structure everybody is given equal status therefore everybody enjoys equal opportunity to discuss ideas, problems, suggestions. This would be exaggeration to say that in the Camp within the span of seven days all the suggestions, ideas and problems of the participants were thoroughly pondered over and analysed. The reason is time constraint and not giving importance to ideas of a selected group. One might question then that there is no

¹⁹⁶It ideal should be so as argued in the prior chapters.

¹⁹⁷This means that the knowledge of the ignorant man is as good to him as the knowledge of a learned man to him.

difference in a vertically structured organization and the Camp because ultimately only some ideas, suggestions get analysed. It must be restated here that in the Camp the heard voices are not of any pre-determined group, already classified under the category of 'important people'. Moreover, the idea that no one is barred speaking, as no demarcation is imposed regarding who are to speak and who are to listen and the effort to give space to the voices definitely has a different impact than a situation where voices are silenced forcefully. Probably the small number of people, present and participating in the workshop process - not more than 350- makes it possible for anyone to directly place her/his problem during the interactive sessions and not have to wait for representatives. Above all, in the Camp discussions of problems goes on at different levels. Facilitators having problem in developing plays can discuss it with the older facilitators, kids having problems in their rooms can talk to the *mejors*, and for food related suggestions there are other people. Therefore there is no one grand body where all the decisions are taken rather a multi-centered approach is taken for smooth functioning.

In the Camp everybody is given opportunity to decide where s/he wants to be engaged. Often relatively older participants, who are in their teens, chose to do managerial chores like going to the market, taking care of the kids, helping in cooking etc. These jobs are given equal amount of space and respect. Many participants come to the Camp who are either dropped out or could not continue their studies or even worse never actually had a chance to go to a proper school. These children often show extraordinary skills in solving management problems¹⁹⁸. In 2010 the Camp was organized in Bidyanagar, Nabadwip. On the first day when the organisers went there they found that one part of the school building was being renovated. The organisers had to clean the rooms, arrange the benches and make provision for participants to stay. The rooms at the first floor needed thorough cleaning and it was very difficult to carry buckets full of water through stairs. Bapi, a teenager from Bagula¹⁹⁹, after some time of introspection, climbed as deftly on a bamboo structure that the masons built for their work. From there he pulled buckets of water and made the cleaning easier. After school hours, as the organisers got to know later, Bapi earned money as a '*jogare*', the helper of masons.

Respecting every skill, whether it is venerated outside the Camp or not- like the job of a mason generally considered inferior- emphasizes the codependence of the people living in the

¹⁹⁸By management I mean here the activities which continue beyond the theatre workshops like marketing, cooking, odd jobs like arranging electrical sources, water supply, cleaning the rooms, taking care of the children when they bathe or have food etc.

¹⁹⁹Bagula is a small town of West Bengal situated near the Bangladesh border.

society, relations which are often overlooked. The above mentioned example is an important reward of practicing a temporary ideal existence in the Camp.

However, no matter how earnestly one believes in equality of expression practically tactical authoritative handling of issues becomes necessary for the sake of the cause. Children coming from poor economic background, slums, pavements have a complete different perception about skills. Many of them consider activities like whistling at a high pitch, singing songs in a shrill and caricatured voice, making lewd gestures to be skills as they have seen people doing these, getting attention in places where they come from. Now when a workshop is conducted only with these children the facilitator has to be equipped with their vocabulary, allow space to these 'skills' and patiently deal with them while navigating through alternate gestural language. Where children from different social backgrounds are present, particularly some of them really young these behaviours become problematic. Children from well-to-do families are taught that these are signs of 'bad' people which create a stigma about these kids and make it difficult to create a space where they can share their experiences and work together.

The only effective strategy is to weave these features into the play where the kid who can whistle would be given the role of a whistler so that he can show the skill he has and not be condemned. Chonu, a young kid dropped out of school and proved to be a problem for the facilitators because he was restless and coming up with strangely vague ideas. The young facilitators who were from middle class backgrounds were not being able to either control or involve him in the play making process. They approached an older facilitator who simply changed the role Chonu was playing. Instead of meek, dumb boy in a boring class with a tyrannical teacher this time he was to play the role of a naughty boy who would enter the class singing a popular Hindi song, "*Tum to thehre pardesi*" and swinging his shirt with it. As he did so, during the improvisation, the boy playing the role of the teacher asked why he is not wearing his school dress to which Chonu answered that he has only one shirt and it got wet in rain. At that moment it stopped being a play and became a narration of his own experience. His natural expression of being naughty bestowed him with much appreciation and from then he was easier to handle.

As the number of participants increases it becomes nearly impossible to deal with all such problems in an individualistic way no matter how much one wants it. The only other option is to use the voice of the authority to tame a child. Last year a boy named *Prabin* came to the Camp and in the go-as --you-like session he became a hermaphrodite. Initially that could have

been seen as a bold step but he has nothing of that sort in mind. He was making lewd gestures, using slangs and very successfully drawing attention. It was a problematic position for the organisers not because what he chose to be but that he was excessive in drawing attention. This trouble went unaddressed. He was doing the main character in a skit in which he again used some of the stereotyped gestures which made some of his co-actors uncomfortable. The characteristics Prabin gathered from the hermaphrodites he saw were the typical gestures of stylized loud clapping, facial expressions that are considered vulgar, abuses, wearing heavy makeup and ornaments etc. He could have been barred from doing that or else he could have been given the task of doing the role of a hermaphrodite with all her complexities. Only then he would realize that there is so much more to the life of a hermaphrodite than just what he thought and represented them to be. Due to time constraint this job could not be done.

The major reason behind having conviction in the horizontal pattern of organisation is that the oppressive society beyond the workshop space thrives on the basis of pyramidal structure and its alternative has to be different both in terms of structure and content.

Economy:

In terms of its economic structure the Camp occupies a unique position amongst other residential workshops. The economics of the camp provides its foundational base. A seven days residential workshop where the number of participants is not less than 150 without any sponsor is considered almost impossible in contemporary times. Nonetheless, the Camp has functioned so far without any funding body, successfully.

A month and half before the Camp bill books are printed and circulated among the organisers. They approach people to donate for the Camp. There are people who cannot come physically to the Camp but support its aspirations by sharing the monetary load. This factor is significant at two levels, firstly people from anywhere can support this workshop and though they may not be able to come they can always feel that they are a part of the Camp that gives them a sense of belonging to a group of people doing things they feel right. Secondly, as the number of organisers grows every year as a snowballing affect²⁰⁰ larger numbers of people get to know about this venture which enlarges the number of supporters.

²⁰⁰Snowball effect is a term used to indicate a process where from one person information about people having any common attribute can be gathered which results in the expansion of the network.

Another economic resource is gathering money through performances. Organisations associated with the Camp prepare skits, puppet plays etc which they perform in their localities and ask from the audience for contributions as they spread a cloth. This is not a new strategy but an old and effective one which was enough to cover a significant portion of the expenditure. Astonishingly though, this practice is no more in vogue because monetary assistance in form of funding or grant is relatively easier to acquire today which tend to cause the indifference in many theatre practitioners who feel it is unnecessary to take their arts to the people and seek their support.

For the Camp this process of collecting money is very much in practise because the organisers believe in being connected with the larger array of people who may not be connected to theatre but constitutes the social reality, we live in. As artists it is one's moral and professional duty to speak of the aspirations and emotions of the people s/he shares the realities with. This also decreases monetary pressure on any individual by sharing it and expands the mass base.

The third source of money is the contribution of the participants which is 300 rupees for an adult and 250 rupees for a child. This amount which may seem trivial to many is quite substantial for many others who could hardly arrange it, especially kids. Every year a sizable portion of participants come from children's Homes, charitable schools, slums and streets. This deficiency is attempted to be covered with the donated money. These children are in no way discouraged rather asked to be a part of the Camp because as one organiser often say and made it an oft quoted line in the Camp "টাকাটা কোন factor নয়"²⁰¹; participation of children is the most important factor.

This is not some sort of charitable zeal providing the economically deprived a chance to be creative but an attempt to initiate a development process of human existence which is not possible if the society is fragmented between 'have not's and have lots' because one's development is not possible without the development of the others. Development here however, does not mean "আর্থিক প্রবৃদ্ধি, যোগ্যতমের ক্রয় করবার সক্ষমতা"²⁰² (Basu 2008), survival of the fittest.

Organisers from the very beginning believed in this economic structure but they faced incidents they could hardly predict. In the first year of the Camp, during the workshop a

²⁰¹Money is not a big factor

²⁰²Monetary enrichment, purchasing capacity of the best (persons).

father came to meet his son and he saw the entire working process. Next days he came with a bag full of vegetables that he as a farmer has grown in his own field. He shared his creation with that of the Camp as an expression of his admiration and support. He was poor and could not give any money for his son but this is the way he supported the workshop. Such instances are common. Children from Bagula one year collected almost 15kgs of rice through their performance, which they brought to the Camp. Last year father of a child brought 5kgs of gram as a donation. These incidents not only enabled a smooth functioning of the workshop but affirm the beliefs that the Camp and the people associated with it hold to be true.

However, these re-energizing incidents do not happen all the time and at times the money is so limited that only rice, *daal* and mashed potato could be arranged for food. This uncertainty could have been avoided if there would have been a funding body or sponsor bearing the expense. This would have also given the organisers more time to concentrate in the theatre making per se and not being distracted thinking how can some money be arranged to meet up the minimum necessities. Yet after fifteen years of the Camp, applying for a funding body does not seem viable to most of the organisers and they gave two reasons for their avoiding sponsors: loosing the mass base and becoming dependent.

It had often been seen that a small number of people who love theatre come together to form a group. They start performing in less popular venues, around their own locality. They appeal to the people to come and see their performances and request the organisers of programmes to give them a chance to perform. In this situation these theatre practitioners have to maintain a connection with the people from whom they can ask donation. Gradually as the quality of their productions improve, they become famous, gets opportunity to perform in more popular venues with larger number of audience and making their existence felt in the bigger domain of theatre. In this situation they can be accessed by many people therefore their message spreads fast and wide. Now it can happen that they might themselves apply for funding or any sponsoring body can approach them. What happens when they get the funding part assured is that their dependence on the people who initially supported them decreases which affects the relationship between the group and the people. Now it is completely optional for the group to maintain any connection as the necessity part is no longer there. Gradually the group loses its local base as they get invited to different districts and the group which once represented the voices of their locality gradually starts dealing with issues which are far from their own reality.

When the resources are limited and crisis looms, new ways of working develops. People try to discover cost-effective methods to adjust, for instance using lanterns and other indigenous sources of lights instead of costly electrical ones, developing mobile sets so that the performance can be done anywhere etc. Under pressure thus new facets of possibilities get revealed.

One can counter-argue here that it is not a crime to wish to do theatre with grandeur. A theatre practitioner may rightfully ask for funding which would give her assurance that she can build the theatre according to her wish without thinking about the scarcity of money. Moreover, in many other countries theatre organisations get international, national and state level sponsorship with very high levels of accomplishment. Then the question reappears, where does the problem of funding lie?

When there is scarcity new paths get opened but when there is abundance all other possibilities gets neglected, it is just the 'money way'. There is ample evidence how groups with talented actor and successful production broke down primarily due to the alleged unequal distribution of the money. Recently in an informal talk a young theatre practitioner shared his experience of working in one of the most popular theatre groups in Kolkata where he mentioned that their groups gets salary grant²⁰³ in the name of twelve of their actors besides the production grant²⁰⁴. Where each actor is allotted 6000 rupees per month the group gives not more than 500 rupees per month to each actor and keeps the rest of the money for the group. Now, who is the 'group'? It is not some abstract body which takes decisions on its own but a number of people who hold more power and have the right to decide while these young actors hardly have any say about issues that directly affect them. This is not unique to the groups of the metropolis but also rampant amongst the groups of sub-urban areas.

Funding is not given to an organisation which does not have registration and a group cannot be registered as long as it does not follow a particular structural model where there has to be posts like president, cashier, secretary, convener, working committee members etc. The jobs are divided; ranks made, distinction created, hierarchy established. This pyramidal organisation can never pose a potent threat to the oppressive forces of the society because it itself operates under the same logic, may be not in same magnitude but the rationale is the same. Funding can therefore be stated as one of the means of the State to control the

²⁰³Salary grant is given to the individual theatre workers for their contribution in theatre.

²⁰⁴Production grant is given to the group for the production.

functions of theatre or any such creative organisation, the ideas they disseminate, the reality they propound.

Moreover, for an external funding body it is problematic to understand differences based on necessities and there is a tendency to homogenize. The ability of money to create conformism is bound to curb the free functioning of the organisation. Ritwik Ghatak once commented “There is no such thing as Art-organisers; it is a monstrous tautology...The nature of the task indicates that only artists can handle the job. Non-artistic Art-organisers will solve these problems to the exact extent that Eskimo hunting songs will rouse and guide Hottentots to revolutionary actions.” (Ghatak 1996)Funding agencies for most of which theatre or any art form is just another form of investment can surely be brought under this category.

In his cult play “*Tiner Tolowar*” Utpal Dutta, one such theatre practitioner who not only engaged in theatre but also the socio-economic and political forces associated with it, made the character Beerkrishna Dan, a *babu* who made his fortune by doing business with the British, say “আমরাই টাকা ঢালব আর আমাদেরই গাল দেবে এমন মামাবাড়ির আবদার তো চলতে পারে না...”²⁰⁵. There is also the English proverb ‘One who pays the flute calls the tune’. Very simply the one providing money will definitely have a controlling effect. If the money is coming from the State then it is certain that the State won’t allow questions to be raised through theatre regarding its authority. State might fund NGOs dealing with poverty alleviation programmes, it might also invite international funders to sponsor these programmes but it would be really naïve to assume that any state will go that far to support any organization that deals with the hidden causes of the persisting poverty in post-colonial, third world countries. If an organization has taken up the cause or has the potential of taking it up the predominant strategy employed is to win that organisation over by giving funding and other incentives and thus making the organisation dependent on and fearful of raising its voice against the power. If this strategy fails to work only then coercive brutal force is used as backup plan.

None of these situations did the organisers of the Camp felt desirable and therefore they chose to be an independent body of theatre practitioners. It is worth mentioning here that the people who donate money for the Camp are requested not to donate more than 1000 rupees individually so that this funding body situation can never occur where dependence on one single source may lead to compromising the process and product.

²⁰⁵ “ We will be the one’s paying money and they will be abusing us only, this whims cannot be tolerated.”

The right to share and the right to contribute give a sense of belonging too. The Camp tries not only to create and establish relations of mutual respect and dependence among the people present and participating in the workshop but also connect them with those who may not be physically present but without whose support, admiration and contribution the Camp would not have been possible.

Unfortunately, this would be an exaggeration to deny that money never became a problem in the Camp though the nature of trouble is quite different from what could be speculated. It is not the scarcity of money rather abundance of it in the hands of individuals which lie at the core of this. For the last three-four years money is reported being stolen from the bags of the participants. So is the case with mobile phones. The incident appeared as alarming and disheartening and against the spirit of the camp. In 2009, two cell phones were stolen and the situation became so critical that one of the oldest organisers had to declare that the programme of the final day could be cancelled if the phones were not found. Evidently the pressure tactic worked and the phones found their way back to their owner.

These events are truly disturbing while, they highlight two separate events. Firstly, these incidents of theft started just three to four years ago and did not exist prior to that. This indicates at several factors like the diverging age groups, varying backgrounds from which children come, number of the participants on which depend the level of intimacy and possibility of face-to face interaction²⁰⁶, the facilitator and participant relation and the skill of the facilitator to enhance the relationship building amongst the participants etc. Probably the major indication pertains to the new lifestyle and onslaught of consumerism. Availability of goods like mobile and currency in the hands of children was not so common even five years back. These are used as the marker of status and unfortunately, identity²⁰⁷. To possess these become an imperative for those who cannot have them otherwise.

Seven days is a very limited time compared to the rest of the year where money is more valued than human beings and it would be outright impractical if not delusional to believe that an endeavour of just seven days can alter the situation. These incidents of money being stolen connects the Camp with the brutal realities that lie outside its periphery and every time it occurs it poses a challenge to indicate the powerful trends against which the beliefs and

²⁰⁶If the number of the participants in large then the possibility that everybody will know each other in depth decreases.

²⁰⁷Having a often mobile phone, being able to show it off makes one feel that /she belongs to the respected lot. Goods marking the identity over human qualities classic instance of commodity fetish.

believers of the ideas of the Camp have to fight. These seven days can no longer afford to be a secluded time and space for practising one's belief as harsh realities of the world beyond penetrates the space violently. These reality checks are always necessary to keep any practice grounded and relevant.

Secondly, there is a silver lining to these events. For the last three-four years a card board box is kept near the main courtyard of the Camp²⁰⁸ for the contribution of the daily visitors. The amount which gets collected everyday is quite substantial and not a single rupee from those boxes has ever been misplaced. One can argue because the box is kept open in front of everybody and taking money from it is very risky. It can also be argued thought that this money does not get stolen because it belongs to everybody. Why would one steal from one's own corpus fund?

Hence denying the incidents of theft would remove the practices of the Camp from the realities of the lives, while acknowledging it and then devising strategies to counter and cure it would not only link it with the lives of the participants beyond those stipulated seven days. This is a step towards a stronger stance against the dehumanising forces operating at all levels of social existence.

The aspired goal:

This leads to the third unique feature of this workshop namely the avowed goal or the destination it aspires to reach with and through theatre. Theatre practitioners saw many times that the sheer factor of working together initiates a kind of energy and mutual cooperation in a creative realm like play making. This is more evident amongst relatively young people because, their living experiences are generally less clouded by the brutalities of the society and it is comparatively easier for them to open up and share their experiences with their contemporaries²⁰⁹. This is however, not to generalize the findings or giving any prescription of how one should expect the children to behave. Sometimes the facilitators come across children who are so disturbingly possessive about their experiences that they choose not to share and block any path of communication. Or they keep on talking about their experiences repeatedly, interrupting others and thus hindering smooth functioning of the work. Both of these expressions are result of the maltreatment of the children's experience by the society

²⁰⁸It is either near where the eating arrangements are made or near the ground or in the main workshop hall.

²⁰⁹ This is viewed excluding the children who face violence and terror regularly, children staying in war zones, victims of trauma etc.

and its adults. If these elements are to be countered for a better option, first the malaises are to be acknowledged and their existence accepted otherwise their remedy is impossible.

The aim of the Camp therefore touches upon an aspiration that connects it with the outer world. Probably the organisers had it in their subconscious that sheer participation would emanate some level of friendship and collaboration and therefore one must aim for something more. Conducting a brilliant workshop or making a stunning production is not enough as it appears to the organisers. "What next?" is the question that haunts them repeatedly. This eventually leads to another question; "what is the ultimate goal one can aspire to reach through theatre?" Is it possible to sustain the belief in togetherness, collective living that are propounded through theatre, once the workshop/performance is over?

For the organisers of the Camp theatre is a means to an end. Smooth process of theatre making and/or a brilliant production are offshoots of the larger journey searching a way for a 'better life'. In most of the other workshops the process ends once the workshop is over but in the Camp the workshop is an initiation of believing in certain principles and checking them in the context of the lived realities which continues after the seven days are over.

It is often visible that participants in a theatre group are very concerned about each other, are collaborative, cooperative, friendly but to the people who are out of this groups, people they meet every day, their family members, shop keepers, rickshaw pullers, servants etc this level of concern does not exist. The emotions and principles of togetherness get confined within the domain of theatrical practices and fail to penetrate the lives of theatre practitioners. Though it is often found that theatre workers²¹⁰ are more comfortable and skilled in creating good rapport with people because they are trained to study characters, find its minute features and use it, in this case to their advantage but establishing this relationship depends on the level of necessity. Having faith in the necessity of establishing cordial relations with people one encounter every day, along with her/his co-theatre workers demands a more conscious effort.

"... [I]magination shrivels and shrinks if it is not nourished by the negotiations that occur between different dimensions of reality."²¹¹ (Schonmann 2011) Life spans beyond theatre and theatre draws its elements from life. Neglecting life for theatre would thus be a stupidity. The

²¹⁰In West Bengal the common term used for this is "Theatre er Chhelera" i.e. the 'boys of theatre'.

²¹¹ Spencer, M. "What More Needs Saying About Imagination?" *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 47(1), 2003:106-113.

aim of the Camp is therefore not to make extraordinary actors or brilliant productions, though it may happen in the course of the workshop, but to encourage one to view her/his world from a distance, analyse it in a sphere of empathetic safety and aspire to make it a better place to live in, through theatre.

Theatre enables one to view alternative realities through its encouragement and execution of imagination in the creative sphere. Any system, that dogmatically prescribes not only its own authenticity and right to exist but in doing so propagates futility of all alternative possibilities, is oppressive. Free imagination, for these systems is a threat which it tries to stop. Simply because theatre can make one see the alternative “[I]t [theatricality] creates disjuncture where ordinary perception sees only unity between signs and their meanings. It replaces uniformity with duality. It perceives the friction and tensions between the various worlds it observes, and obliges to see us differently”²¹² (Nicholson 2009)

“Theatre creates hope, theatre is hope” says Sanjoy Ganguly (Schonmann 2011). A simple naive hope is not enough today rather one needs “educated hope” as Giroux says (Giroux 2004). Giroux further quotes Ernst Bloch from *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, saying hope is not “something non-sense or absolute fantasy; rather it is not yet in the sense of a possibility; that it could be there if we could only do something for it.” A hope needs something to be done about. “Educated hope is a subversive force when it pluralizes politics by opening up a space for dissent, making authority accountable, and becoming an activating presence in promoting social transformation.” (Giroux 2004) Transformation is very much the necessity today because this present is fraught with violence, fragmentation, alienation, a war zone between the have-lots and have-nots (Basu 2008). 800 billion dollars has been invested in the war industry. There should be an alternative, good or bad cannot be said now but at least one to aspire for.

Inkeri Sava (1994) mentions three types of change: qualitative, quantitative and structural amongst which the last one is more durable because its core unit is the individual. Knowing oneself has been the core of basic education as the oft quoted phrase of the Upanishad says “Atmanag Biddhi” i.e. ‘know yourself’. Theatre poses an ‘I’ in front of several ‘not-I’s, a ‘self’ confronting ‘non-self’s thus gaining knowledge about the ‘self’. Understanding and realization are the greatest forces to mobilise people and sustain the mobilisation which no amount of power pressure can match. The belief in collective living is therefore tried to be

²¹² Feral, Josette. “Introduction.” *Substance* 31, 2002: 3-17.

inculcated in the minds of the participants in the Camp. This goal shapes the working processes where dialogue is given priority over monologic discourse.

Yet...

As the initial excitement of being able to implement such a workshop against the socio-economic hindrances is waning off, the process started showing some disturbing lacunas.

If asked, most of the organisers, old and young, would probably unanimously mention the rapidly growing number of participants as the primary problem in the Camp. The number of the organisers and facilitators has not grown very much over the years but the number of participants did which creates both organisational and procedural dysfunction. More importantly because in the Camp everybody is welcome, people- both adults and children- who are not associated with theatre also do come in large number and it becomes difficult for the few facilitators either to incorporate and mould them into theatre making or engage them otherwise. They form a bulk of un-appointed force which gets easily troublesome. The space of the Camp being a non-dominating one has a side effect after all. Participants of young age getting a chance to mingle freely often get involved with each other romantically. This not only hampers the work in the Camp but it also affects others and above all the organisers of the Camp are often accused for these relationships and their often tragic fate by the families of the people involved. There is great dispute amongst the organisers regarding how these cases are to be tackled. While some argue that the organisers should intervene at the first notification and take step like warning them, telling them to concentrate on the work, even send them home if necessary, other feel that the only option is to keep an eye and if found in a compromising situation, to talk to the people concerned and ask them to take their own responsibilities. However, none of these measures seem very useful in the practical field and almost every year for the last couple of years these incidents are occurring at a higher rate.

In terms of the structure, initially the organisers had a loose idea of the working process of the Camp in mind. They added features like morning walk, music session, a separate session for physical exercise etc along with theatre and play making because they felt that these will be aiding their purpose of togetherness. However, as the years passed these became relatively stringent in structure. Now when the routines are made for the workshop these elements appear automatically and occupy a vital part of the working hours, the entire morning. New ideas at times get neglected due to the shortage of time. This seems to be a problem for the people who are coming to Camp for many years as they often get bored by

the repetition of the same tasks every year and ask for new ones. On the other hand for the people who come for the first time all these seem new and therefore they enjoy them.

There are two primary reasons for this problem. Firstly, the number of facilitators is the Camp is really small compared to the growing number of the participants and most of the young facilitators are the products of the Camp and therefore had similar methods and approaches for developing plays. The age wise group division places old and new participants together which makes the situation even more critical. Secondly, the option of inviting theatre practitioners who are not associated with the Camp to come and do work with children and adolescents has proved to be a problem. A new person would not be accustomed to the ideas and beliefs after which the Camp functions. Last year a renowned facilitator, also the guardian of a child voluntarily expressed his desire to work with the *Mejos*. He had a completely different approach which many of the participants found to be dominating and humiliating, an unexpected fall out. The general play making procedure of the Camp is that the facilitator shares if s/he has an idea with the participants or all of them together try to build a narrative. Having an idea, a structure in mind but not sharing it with the participants was unacceptable for many. One of the participants who had worked before with this facilitator enthusiastically said, "You will not even realize, he will extract the elements from you necessary for the play. And it would be a grand one." To this another answered, "That is precisely the problem. I do not want to learn how to act in a play but how a play can be built."

It is therefore imperative to not only find a skilled theatre worker but also a sympathetic one who would at least respect the ideas of the Camp if not accepts them fully. Moreover most of the young facilitators who have been trained in the Camp do not find a space to practice facilitation once the workshop is over. People associated with theatre groups often complain that their groups do not allow them the space they need to experiment because the target is often a production and those who are not part of any theatre groups the chance is even slimmer. In case of the latter, a person has to have organising skills along with the facilitating ability to build a space where s/he can then experiment and practise, which is a very difficult task.

Another associated problem is that after the seven days of the Camp any sort of follow up nearly becomes impossible. Seven days are not enough to satisfy queries of any single child either about theatre or about life, what the Camp aims to touch. After the Camp a child can

contact the organisers personally and discuss about her/his problems but minus the collective presence it is not the same as in the Camp. On the other hand many children come to the Camp only once. Several instances can be given about children who in spite of having immense potentiality were just left out in the course of the time. Tapas came to the Camp when he was eight years old. After that he could never manage to come again. He had a unique sense of humour and excellent skill of comic timing. He could have been a great actor on the contrary to which he has now become a local goon, an expert in making bombs. Suroj was so energetic that the facilitators had to devise tasks constantly to keep him engaged. He had to go to Mumbai to work in a factory. Biswa, Probhas went to Dubai, Lakxmi, Mala got married before they could finish their schooling, Surekha ran away with a man she thought would keep her happy, Bonny, Tuya got married to wealthy doctors and have no contact with theatre anymore- instances are almost unending. “At times it seems that as if we are aiming for something which is simply not possible. We invest so much effort and emotion on each person and they are just taken away from us. However, we cannot stop trying. *Jatra korle tobu sombhabona jage*”²¹³ says Amolesh with a smile.

It is difficult to devise any single process of play making that can satisfy old and new participants. Two major processes go side by side in the Camp, one is the play making process and other is the managerial works like cooking, going to the market, doing odd jobs like fixing lights, cleaning the bathrooms etc. People who are accustomed with the play making processes tend to be engaged with the managerial works and these are relatively older participants. The problem that arises here is that there are not enough tasks in this sector that can keep these adolescents occupied for a long time. The number of participants in this age group is pretty big and they finish these jobs really fast and then because they are not engaged in play making process they tend to hang out in groups and chat.

Titul, one of the oldest participants, who joined as a participating child and now acts as a facilitator, has her own doubts regarding the expected relationship between the Camp as a mode of living and the other institutions of the society. The society beyond the Camp teaches individuals commodity obsession. On the other hand it continues to devise reasons for war and violence at the global scale. The war mongers and the market conglomerates have made such an inseparable bond that they always look after each other. In such a situation the Camp might survive because it is after all a collective endeavour but what will happen to the

²¹³This line literally means “At least there is hope when the journey is started.”

individuals, especially the children who had to go back to their realities once the Camp is over? Recently, the participants encountered a person who is a caretaker of a school who was very confident saying, “The school belongs to the teachers where the students study.” It is as if the purpose of the education system, embodied by that school is to engage the teachers and the learning students are the by-products. Unfortunately this is the general outlook and not any exception. A child who has to survive in this situation, what good will the ideas of mutual respect and cooperation do to her? In that case on the face of these unchanging rigid structures can the Camp do anything but serve as a safety valve, a falling back zone, a temporary wish fulfilling reality? The Camp aspires to alter the oppressive reality but in order to do so it induces certain ideas that create turmoil in the lives of the participants. However, probably there is no other way; the change has to start from within an individual’s psyche.

It cannot be denied that the commonality amongst the organisers which acted as a positive factor in establishing the workshop is gradually having a narrowing effect. Most of the organisers of the Camp came from educated middle class. They were exposed to similar ideas regarding the role theatre should play in the society. They formed a homogeneous group which reduced the possibilities of ideological clashes amongst them which could have led to newer direction of conceptualising children’s theatre. More importantly, the involuntary exclusion of the people of the lower rung of the society at the level of conceptualising this workshop limits it to the middle class intelligentsia. People from poor economic background get associated with the Camp either as participants i.e. the children or as the parents of these children. They often give manual labour to ensure smooth functioning of the Camp but are not part of the thinking process though there is no restriction. Though there are no lines differentiating these people from the organisers, at least in the Camp, there remains a division which the Camp has not been able to overcome yet.

However...

Solutions of all the aforementioned problems are not yet devised and will probably never be. The reason is not the lack of willingness but the variety of the problems; some are at the conceptual level while some are at the level of execution. More importantly it is too early to predict which way the Camp is going, what the vital junctures are and where it missed a turn.

However, the problem of a follow-up has been taken care of by the workshop for the ‘mejós’ (meaning intermediate). Every year during the summer vacation another five-seven days

workshop is organised for those who have reached their teenage years and could not be given much attention in the Camp because the primary focus was on the children.

Initially this '*Mejo Mela*' started as a workshop to train the would-be-facilitator. People who were engaged with children's theatre or had the will to do so were asked to come. Two distinctive problems occurred here: firstly, facilitating children cannot be taught and learnt theoretically. The young facilitators needed children with whom they can work and learn in the process. Children were not available. Secondly, the participants of this workshop expressed their opinion that they are not satisfied just by learning how to facilitate. "In the Camp we facilitate the children; here we learn how to facilitate. Where are we going to learn the technicalities of theatre? When will we learn how to be an actor? When are we going to do a play? When are we going to act?" they asked. The older organisers also realized that these people not only need to learn the technicalities of acting and facilitating but they also need to know the ideas underlying the theatre practise, the politics and economics of theatre, the ideologies of a certain practise because they are the one's expected to take up the responsibility of the Camp in future. Since then this workshop was devoted to train the participants not only in facilitation but also acting and various theatrical discourse.

The purpose of this workshop is to create an extension of the Camp. Because it engages relatively older people therefore it is possible here to deal with issues more complex and subtle without trying to simplify it. Issues like the effect of state funding on theatre, politics of organisational structure, nature of state censorship, comparative analysis of various kinds of theatre making processes etc are discussed here at length.

This workshop works as the second step where the people who initially used to come to the Camp get initiated to the higher level where they get the opportunity to view and literally dissect the processes of organising a workshop like the Camp and analyse their own theatre practices. People who have not come to the Camp are also welcome here because the basic idea is to create an inclusive space and share ideas.

Therefore...

What does the Camp aim for briefly is not to create a brilliant actor or a fine production, nor even to bring back the pre-determined marginal ones into the mainframe of social living but build a collective of able human beings which will then eventually question any exclusive

system of existence. It is not just overall equality; quantitatively same to all but also the initiation of the mind in a domain where demanding this is logical and qualitatively analysed.

If knowledge is what differentiates human beings from other animals then the search of it must be a collective one so that “একজন একদিক ধরেই এগোবেন, দশজন মানুষ দশদিক ধরে এগোবেন। যোগফলে এক একজন মানুষ দশদিগন্তেরই স্বাদ পাচ্ছেন যা তিনি একা কখনই পেতে পারতেন না”(Basu 2008)

Those who want to continue monopolizing their hold over the determining factors of human fate, the power conglomerates, propound that this search of knowledge, that makes life better can only be made by a selected few and not all. And they create all sorts of hindrances to ensure that. A camp or a couple of camps does not stand a chance there to make a difference. Or do they?

“শান্ত থেকে নির্মাণে থাকাটাই বড় রকমের প্রতিবাদ”²¹⁴(Basu 2008). An artist has to be both calm and creative at the same time. The creation can be small but may contain the seed of future transformation. Being able to transform is the innate quality of human existence, snatching which from the majority in order to ensure the hold of a few over them is an act of oppression. Reclaiming this right must be collective to maximize its effect that guarantee its sustenance. Theatre has been a successful medium to spread the idea that to be able to transform is everyone’s right and ability and not the privilege of a few. This realization creates a common ground where individuals can come together and create collectively, thus build a community of creators. This may appear as an absurd hope, but what this hope “offers is the belief that different futures are possible.”(Giroux 2004) It is not the liberation of the individual from the social rather it is through the social (Giroux 2004).

The Camp aspires to achieve this goal. Will it be successful in doing this? May be it is too early to speculate

²¹⁴Keeping calm and continue being creative is a huge protest

Conclusion

“অতএব ছেলে যদি মানুষ করিতে চাই, তবে ছেলেবেলা হইতেই তাহাকে মানুষ করিতে আরম্ভ করিতে হইবে, নতুবা সে ছেলেই থাকিবে, মানুষ হইবে না।”²¹⁵(Tagore 1910)

This statement gives us two important ideas; childhood is the formative period of one’s life therefore learning²¹⁶ must start at that age. More importantly, Tagore hints at what Paulo Freire would elaborate later, the age of initiation to the process of liberating education. Process has to be formulated from the very beginning considering the goal. This education should be carried out to pave the path of liberation and not be deferred till the ‘revolution is won’. If it is “not possible to dialogue with the people [here the children] before the power is taken, because they have no experience with dialogue...” it cannot be a liberating process. Likewise if a child is not taught the process of ‘valuing’²¹⁷(Osterlind 2011) from an early age her/his chance of being a responsible human being is much less. This is the thorough preparation for the future, therefore the process may seem untimely advanced for the present but the visionaries can evaluate its worth.

Charlie Cooper refers to Plant saying that

“... over the past 200 years: ‘the notion of community has been used almost universally by social and political philosophers to point up some of the drawbacks and baneful characteristics of urban industrial society and to point the way towards new and more humane forms of social relations.’”(Cooper 2008)

Cooper continues after Margaret Stacey, “...there are so many different and competing definitions of the term that these have become almost meaningless and are best avoided” and therefore it is not that important to list what the existing definitions of community rather it is useful to see “... how the idea of community has been utilized by various individuals and interest groups to pursue an ambition or vision”(Cooper 2008). This research therefore attempted to clarify what is meant by ‘community’ here.

“আমাদের ডানপাশে ধস/ আমাদের বাঁয়ে গিরিখাদ / আমাদের মাথায় বোম্বার্ক/ পায়ে পায়ে হিমালীর বাঁধ/... আমরাও তবে এইভাবে/এমুহূর্তে মরে যাব নাকি / আমাদের পথ নেই আর/ আয় আরও বেঁধে বেঁধে থাকি।”²¹⁸

This is not only a poet’s imagination rather the actually the only way for survival. Every collectivity is an assertion of the existence. More is the pressure to overlook the uniqueness of the collective and assimilate it within a broader social existence higher is the resistance.

²¹⁵“Therefore if we want to make a human out of a human-child then the process must start in the childhood. Otherwise it will always remain a child and will never be a human.”

²¹⁶Not only the lessons which are taught in institutions but lessons from one’s life and environment.

²¹⁷Osterlind refers to Jon Steinberg who encouraged their students to develop their own values instead of following or copying others. He sees it to bridge the gap between words and deeds. He calls them ‘active value’.

²¹⁸ “We have a landslide on our right, a cliff on the left. There is a bomber circling above our heads and the snowy barrier blocking our path. Will we all die at this moment, this way? We don’t have any other option, come, be together.”

Identity politics was “initially defined by and for the new social movements that came to public consciousness from the late 1960’s”(Weeks 1990). Today it has taken a violent turn in the face of global imposition of homogenizing forces and draws its justification from the right to resist. What it does is it creates a closed group or community and then claims its superiority over the others. This claim is at the core of the trouble not the community per se.

Community acts a space between the forces of state and market²¹⁹, as if a third space. From it the individuals draw a sense of ‘belonging’ which enables one to anchor oneself and “resist isolation and being fundamentally ‘out of touch’ ”(Rutherford 1990). The static identity that a community may bestow on its members hinders the process of being empathetic and acknowledging to the ‘other’, the different. Homi Bhabha comments that it must therefore not “... so much [be] identity as identification... identification is a process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness, at which point the agency of the identification –the subject- is itself always ambivalent”(Rutherford, *The Third Space- Interview with Homi Bhabha* 1990). The recognition of the “otherness in ourselves”(Rutherford 1990) enables one to be more open and tolerant to the ‘other’.

Identification is a continuous process and not an end result of any relationship therefore activities that ensure this identification must also emphasize the process because only through affirming and reaffirming this process a community can be sustained.

Theatre has this potential of communication which for Habermas should be the basis of any community, a space to share ideas, belief, reasons and emotions. At the core of theatre, as an art form, operates the belief in equality where the audience and performers need each other to exist. A theatre performance is constituted by multi-layers of codes that the audiences must be able to de-code to move from “code to message” as K.S. Goodman says (Bandopadhyay 1999). The audience might agree with the message or they may oppose it- in any case the communication goes on. By allowing the audience a voice theatre can resist dominating monologic narratives.

Theatre is considered to be an important idea and force because on one hand it has the potential of developing the analytic, critical, rational faculty in a person and on the other being a collective working process it inculcates faith in and superiority of community living compared to egotistic individualism. Thus through theatre a collective of able individuals can emerge.

History shows that children have almost always been part of the performance repertoire, in the West as well as in India. Yet acknowledging the fact that they are not the same as adults and therefore have to be treated differently was not considered for long. Change in perceiving a child and childhood emerged only by the end of the nineteenth century. It took almost another half-century to realize that perceiving children differently from the adults was not enough the society needs to nourish them in a special way. For this it was felt that the institution which was given the greatest responsibility to develop a human from a child, the education system, needed a transformation. Instead of preparing the young generation only to

²¹⁹It has features taken from both the other spaces.

fill the vacancies of the job market it was felt necessary to enable them to be engaged with the reality both rationally and emotionally. To achieve this goal theatre/drama was entered the institutionalized education system.

It is interesting to note that none of the changes took place because the children demanded so. It was always the adults who decided what was good for the children and thus the changes came into being. The children were always the receivers, who are spoken for, about and on behalf of. As the children along with their necessities and aspirations, were represented by the adults, their presence was often reduced to an entity only to validate the discourses adults were having about them. The adults who genuinely wanted to bring the voice of the children to the forefront often missed that by dissociating the voice from the children they are actually negating their existence. It would be naïve therefore, to assume that this complex equation can be resolved by simply introducing an art form in the lives of the young. Unless the children learn how to use the medium to speak for themselves it will hardly change the situation because “সংগ্রহ করিতে শিখিলেই যে নির্মাণ করিতে শেখা হইল ধরিয়৷ লওয়া হয়, সেইটাই একটা মস্ত ভুল।”²²⁰(Tagore 1910)

An adult can understand the reality much deeply than a child because s/he has seen and known more and not because of any other innate quality. That does not mean that the adult can understand the child's reality better than the child itself though s/he may be able to resolve problems a child is having. S/he can therefore either solve the problem for the child or teach the child how to solve a problem so that next time the child can do it by herself. The latter enables the child not only to overcome that particular problem but also that of her dependency. By considering the child's problem a serious one and dealing it likewise the adult may be able to subtly teach the child to value other's opinions and emotions. Solving the problem for her would have taken less time and effort but have never been able to reach at this deeper level of realization.

Following this line of argument this can be stated that it is only possible to inculcate a child's faith in collective living or any idea, when the child is given enough space to argue, dissent and question. Any other way would be an imposition that may wear off if faced with a greater imposition.

Theatre practices in the proposed research area- Kolkata and adjacent suburbs- show an array of varied ways but very few of the really engages this deeply with the children and the medium. Partially it is due to the fact that facilitators are either not aware of the potential of children's theatre fully or they are not willing to take the risk of delving deeper into the unsafe zone where the children are free to question. The other reason, which has always been a persistent factor, is the sanction of the state.

A common feature which is found in many of the children's theatre organisers is that their belief that what they are doing is a great act of benevolence and they should be praised for that. They are as if doing a favor by giving the children an opportunity. This is so subtly

²²⁰“It is a big mistake to assume that the ability to gather is equal to the ability of being able to use the gathered material.”

embedded in the minds that often the people themselves are not aware of it. This mentality comes out mostly through gestures, expressions, patronizing tones and in statements like “কত কষ্ট করে শেখাই, তারপরেও জানেন তো একটুও মন দেয় না।”²²¹. The children become the pawns of satisfying one’s ego and nothing else. This mentality adversely affects the practice and therefore needs to be checked. Otherwise children’s theatre will continue suffering from the gap between its theories and practices.

The Camp is an exception in this case. This workshop genuinely tries to engage in a dialogue with the children. Hopefully there might be other workshops as well, some other people working towards the same destination but due to the fact that these are small and intense spaces finding them is a problem.

The biggest drawback that the Camp has which impedes the process is the limited time, seven days. But may be because it is only seven days that the spark is sustained. If it would have been a continuous practice, a theatre group, how successful it would have been in sustaining the enthusiasm and joy is a question. Moreover, the economic structure that the Camp follows now might need to change if the seven day’s workshop changes into a longer theatre exercise.

Paulo Freire has argued that “...the discipline necessary to any organization must not be confused with regimentation.” It would be wrong to discipline the process so much that it becomes mechanized to ensure smooth functioning of the process. The unpredictability in a human indicates the drive towards the eternal perfectibility, an attribute that makes one human. It is more so in case of children who are always in search of something new. If the process cannot give them the ‘new’ then they might either lose interest in the work or worse get transformed into clogs of the machine. And “মানুষের কাছ হইতে মানুষ যাহা পায় কলের কাছ হইতে তাহা পাইতে পারে না। কল সম্মুখে উপস্থিত করে কিন্তু দান করে না- তাহা তেল দিতে পারে কিন্তু আলো জ্বলাইবার সাধ্য তাহার নাই।”²²²(Tagore 1910)A mechanized art organisation can give no new ideas to the people.

At the very beginning it was mentioned that the aim of the research is not to find the conclusive answer whether theatre, especially children’s theatre, can inculcate community ethos amongst its participants. Rather it aimed at finding the potentials children’s theatre practice in the research area do and can have to achieve this goal. What was found through the research is children’s theatre as an idea may have certain possibilities of transforming the reality but how far this idea can be materialized depends on how this medium is used and to what end.

People who believe that collective living is the answer to the worldwide forces of fragmentation and isolation would continue devising strategies to ensure its genesis and theatre can be a medium of that

²²¹“ I undertake so much pain you know, but they never take it seriously.”

²²²“What a human can get from another human, cannot be gotten from a machine. A machine can bring stuff in front but it cannot deliver. It can give oil but it does not have the capacity to enlighten.”

“যাত্রা করলে তবু সম্ভবনা জাগে।”

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Appendix

Appendix 1.

Year	No. of Camp	Place	School	Play(major one)
1998	1	Sarberiya		Moner Manush
1999	2	Ushagram, Birnagar		Joyee
2000	3	Jethiya, Halisahar		Ruddhodhara
2001	4	Uchchhegarh, Shyamnagar		Ramdhonu
2002	5	Gobardanga		Titumir
2003	6	Bachhurdoba, Jhargram		Jatra
2004	7	Ramnagar		Desh
2005	8	Rasulpur		Bongobhongo
2006	9	Polashi. Kanchrapara		Moy
2007	10	Jambani,		Hansulibanker

		Bolpur		Upokotha and Bisarjan
2008	11	Rautari, Simurali		Bhalomanush
2009	12	Khonnyan		Prometheus
2010	13	Bidyanagar		Chaitanya
2011	14	Duttapukur		Surjer Siri
2012	15	Dhonicha, Chakdaha.		Muktodhara

Appendix 2.

The list of the songs

মেলা মেলা (1999)

মেলা মেলা শিশুমেলা আমাদেরই মেলা রে
এইখানেতে আছে শুধু নাটক আর খেলা রে
জীবন চলেছে জীবনের পথে সাতরঙা উড়িয়ে
আমরা তাতে করি মজা প্রাণ যায় জুড়িয়ে
মিলেমিশে কেটে যাবে আনন্দের এই বেলা রে
মেলা মেলা ...

অচেনাকে চিনে নিয়ে বন্ধু মোরা করেছি
অজানাকে জেনে নিয়ে কতো ছবি এঁকেছি
সেই ছবিতে আঁকা আছে আমাদেরই আশা রে
সেই ছবিতে ফুটে ওঠে আমাদেরই ভাষা রে
বারেবারে দেখা হবে বন্ধুদের সাথে রে
মেলা মেলা...

আমার বন্ধু আসিফ
আমার বন্ধু আসিফ
আমার বন্ধু রেখা

আমার বন্ধু মাইকেল
কেউ নই আর একা
আমার বন্ধু তিল্লি
আমার বন্ধু জন
আমার বন্ধু নাজমা
আমার সবাই আপনজন
আমার বন্ধু মানুষ
আমার বন্ধু পাখি
আমার বন্ধু নারকেল গাছ
আমি বন্ধুকে ডাকি
আমার বন্ধু তুমি
তোমার বন্ধু কই
আমিই তোমার বন্ধু
আমরা একসাথে বাঁচবই।
কথা ও সুর- কবীর সুমন

আকাশ আমায় (2000)

আকাশ আমায় শিক্ষা দিল উদার হতে ভাইরে
কর্মী হওয়ার মন্ত্র আমি বায়ুর কাছে পাইরে
পাহাড় শিখায় তাহার সমান হই যেন ভাই মৌন মহান
খোলা মাঠের উপদেশে দিলখোলা হই তাইরে

সূর্য আমায় মন্ত্রণা দেয় আপন তেজে জ্বলতে
চাঁদ শিখাল হাসতে মিঠে মধুর কথা বলতে
ইঙ্গিতে তার শিখায় সাগর অন্তর হোক রঙ্গ আকর
নদীর কাছে শিক্ষা পেলাম আপন বেগে চলতে

মাটির কাছে সহিষ্ণুতা পেলাম আমি শিক্ষা
আপন কাজে কর্তর হতে পাষণ দিল দীক্ষা
ঝর্না তাহার সহজ গানে গান জাগাল আমার প্রাণে
শ্যাম বনানী সরসতা আমায় দিল ভিক্ষা

বিশ্বজোড়া পাঠশালা মোর সবার আমি ছাত্র
নানান ভাবের নতুন জিনিস শিখছি দিবারাত্র

এই পৃথিবীর বিরাট খাতায় পাঠ্য যে সব পাতায় পাতায়
শিখছি সেসব কৌতূহলে সন্দেহ নাই মাত্র

কথা- ভবানীপ্রসাদ মজুমদার।

সুর- সুজাতা গোস্বামী

নদী নদী (2002)

নদী নদী ছোট নদী, নদীর নাম যমুনা

দু'ধারে তার ছিল হাজার সবুজের বিছানা

একদিন কত'না ঢেউ-এর ভালে

খেলত নদীর গান বজরার পালে

খামল নদীর স্রোত হারাল ঠিকানা

ফিরে ফিরে আসি মোরা(2004)

ফিরে ফিরে আসি মোরা বছর বছর ঘুরে খেলতে নাটক নিয়ে খেলা

শিশুকিশোর বিকাশ মেলা

হালিশহর, বগুলা, শান্তিপুর

নৈহাটি, রাণাঘাট আর বোলপুর থেকে ভাসিয়ে মজার ভেলা

শিশুকিশোর বিকাশ মেলা

সকালের ঘোরা থেকে কিচির মিচির

অনাবিল আনন্দে স্বপ্ন মিছিল

মাইম মুখোশ আর আলো নিয়ে খেলা

মনের জানলাটার খুলে দিয়ে থিল

তাই কখনো কখনো ফের গলা ছেড়ে গেয়ে ওঠা গেঁথে নিয়ে সাতসুরে মালা

শিশু কিশোর বিকাশ মেলা

মেলার গান (2006)

শিশুমেলা কিশোরমেলা ন'বছরে এসে

মিলে গেল নাটকের তানে নাচে গানে হেসে হেসে

কাঁচরাপাড়ার পলাশীতে বসেছে হট্টমেলা

চলছে নাটক রণপা পাপেট ছোট মুখোশের খেলা
আসছে বছর মিলবো আবার নতুন বন্ধু পাব
ভালবাসার রঙিন আবীর ছড়িয়ে দিয়ে যাব ।।

ছোট সবুজ

ছোট সবুজ জমি ছিল ছিল তাতে সারি সারি গাছ
পাশদিয়ে তার বয়ে যেত নদী নদীতে সাঁতার দিত মাছ
কালো মেঘ উড়ে যেতে যেতে থমকে দাঁড়াত সেই পথে
বৃষ্টি ভিজিয়ে দিত মাটি ঘন হত সবুজ পাতাটি
স্বপ্নের সেই মায়াদ্বীপে সঙ্কলে মিলেমিশে
আসত সন্ধ্যা পা টিপে আলো হত পাখিদের শিষে
একদিন কারা যেন এসে গাছপালা কেটে ছারখার
মাটিতে বুজিয়ে দিয়ে নদী বানাল সে প্রাসাদ প্রকার
তারপরে মেঘ আসনিকো পাখিরা কোথায় গেছে যে ফিরে
সবুজ সে ফিকে হতে হতে মরুভূমি হল ধীরে ধীরে

মেলার গান (2007)

দশটি বছর পেরিয়ে মোরা আজ মিলেছি বোলপুরে
মাতলা থেকে কোপাই এলাম ইছামতীর পথ ধরে
শিশির ভেজা শিউলি ঝরা খোয়াই ধারে কাশের বন
বার্তা পাঠায় শিশুমেলায় উড়াল দিতে সবুজ মন
উপচে গেছে পাওনা ঝুলি জানা চেনার সম্বারে
এই জানাকে ছড়িয়ে দেব প্রান্ত থেকে প্রান্তরে

মেলার গান (2007)

শরত শেষের হিমেল পরশ নিতে এলাম রাউতাড়ি
মেলা এবার দশ ছাড়িয়ে এগারোতে দেয় পাড়ি

আজ যে শিশু কাল সে কিশোর
পথের শেষে হচ্ছে যে ভোর
অচেনা মন সামলে নেবে জীবন জোয়ার চাপান উত্তোর
পথ চলেছে মেলা শিশুর শিশুমেলায় আয় সবাই
সবুজ মনের রঙ-তুলিতে রাঙিয়ে জীবন যা না ভাই

টুং টাং

টুং টাং নদী তীরে ডিঙ ডং গ্রামটি
সেখানে থামুক গিয়ে তিন নং ট্রামটি
পান্থরের বাড়ি ঘর রঙ টং করা নেই
ইশকুল ঢং ঢং পড়া নেই পড়া নেই
সেখানে আকাশে চাঁদ টিং টিঙে ফালি
আম জাম বাগানের ভীম সিং মালি
সং সেজে বসে আছে ফল ছুঁতে মানে নেই
অং বং পুলিশের থানা নেই থানা নেই
একঝাক পড়ুয়ার ক্রিং ক্রিং ফুর্তি
তিন নং ট্রামছাড়া এইভাবে উড়তি
ভাঁজ করা রামধনু পিং পং সাঁই সাঁই
জং ধরা লোহাদেরও চং মং প্রান চাই

মেলার গান (2009)

অনেক আশায় বুকটি ভরে এসেছি আজ এই মেলায়
বেঁধে বেঁধে থাকব সবাই মাতব নতুন কত খেলায়
খেলতে খেলতে গাঁথছি ছবি বসছে কথা যেমন চাই
তৈরি হবে নতুন নাটক কোথাও কিছুর অভাব নাই
পাওনা ঝুলি ভরিয়ে তুলে ফিরব যে যার ঠিকানায়
রাখব মনে বছর বছর যা শিখেছি এই মেলায়

বছর বছর(2010)

বছর বছর শিশুমেলায় বাচ্চা বুড়ো যারা
কাজের নেশায় লাগিয়ে মাতন ফেলছে ভীষণ সাড়া
তাতেই খুশি হয়ে যখন ফুটছে মুখে হাসি
সুমন তখন গান ধরেছেন বাঁচতে ভালবাসি
ভোর থেকে রাত যেইখানেতে হচ্ছে হৃদয় খাঁটি
সোনার চেয়ে দামী সে যে শিশুমেলার মাটি
আহা শিশুমেলার মাটি
কথা- সুরত ঘোষ। সুর- বিদিশা ঘোষ

ফুটবল খেলতেই হবে

ফুটবল খেলতেই হবে

কিন্মা সাঁতার গাছে চড়া

যত খুশি দুষ্টুমি

আর তার সাথে একমনে পড়া পড়া পড়া

বইগুলো বন্ধু হলে মুশকিলগুলো সব হাওয়া

হারার প্রশ্ন নেই কোন সবখানে শুধু জিতে যাওয়া

তারা তা তারা তারা তা তারা তারা তা তারা তারারারা

কথা- প্রীতি মজুমদার

সুর- বিদিশা ঘোষ

পথের প্রান্তে(2011)

পথের প্রান্তে কোন সুদূর গাঁয়ে / যেথা সময় থমকে থামে বটের ছায়ে

আহা সন্ধ্যাদীপ জ্বালে তারার টিপ / যেন ফুলের গন্ধে মোর মন মাতায়

হায় কোন সুদূর সেই স্বপ্নপুর / মোর মন যে গায় ঘরে ফেরার সুর

মোর পথ চেয়ে আজও সেই মেয়ে / বুদ্ধি স্বপ্নজাল বোনে গান গেয়ে
 মেলার রাস্তা ধরে মেয়ের দল / যেত কাঁকন বাজিয়ে পায়ে রুপোর মল
 আহা তাদের গান করে ব্যাকুল প্রাণ / মোর স্মৃতির পাতায় আনে অশ্রুজল
 হয় কোন সুদূর সেই স্বপ্নপুর / মোর মন যে গায় ঘরে ফেরার সুর
 মোর পথ চেয়ে আজও সেই মেয়ে / বুদ্ধি স্বপ্নজাল বোনে গান গেয়ে
 চিন্তাহীন সেই সুখের দিন / কেন আমার চিতে আজও বাজায় বীণ
 সেই শালের বন, মোর ঘরের কোণ / যেন নিবীড় বক্ষে মোর অন্তরীণ
 হয় কোন সুদূর সেই স্বপ্নপুর / মোর মন যে গায় ঘরে ফেরার সুর
 মোর পথ চেয়ে আজও সেই মেয়ে / বুদ্ধি স্বপ্নজাল বোনে গান গেয়ে

This is a song composed in the tunes of the Jamaica Farewell and has a similar content.

আয় মিতেনী(2012)

আয় মিতেনী চাঁদ-রাতে হাত রাইখে হাতে হাতে
 নাচি গাহি কাটাই দিব রাত
 সকাল হলে তুলতে যাব পাত
 ফরেস্ট গার্ডের চিলের আঁখি তুই যেন গুরুর পাখি
 নজর দিলে ভাঙ্গি দিব ঠিকাদারের হাত
 নাচি গাহি কাটাই দিব রাত
 কুড়কুড়ের ডিম আছে ক্যান্দ-মহল গাছে গাছে
 ইসব খায়ে কাটাব ভুখ রাত
 নাচি গাহি কাটাই দিব রাত
 বন জঙ্গল সুখা মাটি জনম মরণ ভিটা বাটি
 গতর পড়ি গেলে হেথায় বুজবে আঁখিপাত
 নাচি গাহি কাটাই দিব রাত
 খাব-দাব নাচব গাব ভিটা ছাড়ি কুখা যাব
 সুহাগভরে জনম দিব ফুটলে নতুন পাত

This is Jumur song, a folk form from the western side of West Bengal.

The list of Rabindra Sangeet:

আলোকের এই ঝরনাধারায়
আগুনের পরশমণি
আমার মনের কোণের বাইরে
আপন হতে বাহির হয়ে বাইরে দাঁড়া
ওরে নূতন যুগের ভোরে
আজ প্রথম ফুলের পাব প্রসাদখানি

Appendix 3.

Songs of puppet shows and *Pater Gaan*.

পুতুল নাটক(1999)

আমি প্রথমে বন্দনা করি সমীর পুতুলকার
আর তাঁর সাথী সঞ্জীবকাকু তাঁরে নমস্কার
শুনে বন্ধুগন
শুনে বন্ধুগন দিয়া মন আমার গল্পখানা
সেই গল্পে দেখেন কত কান্ডকারখানা-
দেখেন চোখটি খুলে
দেখেন চোখটি খুলে দুলে দুলে সকল মহাশয়
দু'চার পয়সা দেবেন যাতে নতুন পুতুল হয়
দিদিদাদারা-
দিদিদাদারা শোনে সবাই আমাদের এই দেশে
সবুজঘেরা গ্রাম একখান আকাশ পারে মেশে
সেই গ্রামখানিতে
সেই গ্রামখানিতে নানা রঙের ভরা ছিল গাছ

আকাশ জুড়ে হত রোজই প্রজাপতির নাচ
সেই গাছখানিতে
সেই গাছখানিতে রংবেরং-এর ভরা ছিল ফুল
পাখিরা সব উড়ে আসে জোটে মধুকুল
আহা দেখতে ভাল
আহা দেখতে ভাল করে আলো ফুলটি মাথা নাড়ে
আর দূরের থেকে প্রজাপতি আসে উড়ে উড়ে
আহা কি যে জাদু
আহা কি যে জাদু নিতে মধু ফুলের বুক বসে
রঙ্গিন পাখায় কাঁপন লাগায় জগত ওঠে হেসে
কিন্তু এমন শোভা
কিন্তু এমন শোভা রইল না ভাই চিরদিনের তরে
ওদের খুশী দেখে লোভীর বুক চড়চড় করে
ভাই উঠে আসে
ভাই উঠে আসে কঠিন হেসে দখলদারী নিতে
গাছপালা ভেঙ্গে চায় ফুল ছিঁড়ে দিতে
হায় হায় একি হল

হায় হায় একি হল

(-----আ)

কিন্তু চাইলেই কি আর নিতে যায় ভাই এই পৃথিবীর আলো
এখনও যে আছে দেশে অনেক মানুষ ভাল
যারা ভালবাসে
যারা ভালবাসে নীল আকাশে পাখিদের ওই খেলা
তার নীচে ভালবাসে প্রজাপতির মেলা
তাই ছুঁয়ে ছুঁয়ে
তাই ছুঁয়ে ছুঁয়ে দেয় বাঁচিয়ে যত ফুলের গাছ

আকাশ ভেঙ্গে শুরু হয় প্রজাপতির নাচ

না না লললালা লা লা -----

রূপসী পুসি(2002)

পুতুলনাচিয়ে:

একদিন দুপুর বেলা সন্ধ্যাই ঘুমোচ্ছে যখন

একটা ছোট ছেলে/মেয়ে একা খড়কুটো নিয়ে তখন

কি করছিল শনবে? শোন

বানাচ্ছিল এক মূর্তি তাই তার আজ খুব ফুর্তি

নিজের হাতে গড়া কীর্তি বেড়ালটা একেবারে সত্যি সত্যি

সত্যি?

দেখবে? এই দেখ (বেড়াল সামনে আসে)

লালা লাল্লা লাল্লা...

কি সুন্দর তাই না?

নিজেকে নিজে তাই দেখছে দেখছে যত ভাল লাগছে

এত ভাল দেখতে আমি কি শুনি আর সব কি বলছে

তাই বেড়াল করল কি সবার সামনে দিবে হেঁটে হেঁটে বেড়াতে লাগল

লালা লাল্লা লাল্লা...

এমন সময় এল একটা বাঘ ... হালুম

তিনি আসছেন তিনি আসছেন হেলে দুলে আসছেন

আর ভাবছেন মনে ভাবছেন সামনে ওটা কে

বাঘ:

আরে একি এয়ে বিল্লি তুমি হঠাৎ কি করে

এত সুন্দর হলে বল চোখ ফেরাই কি করে

বেড়াল: তবে, বল বল! ডোরাকাটার খুব দেমাক না? দিয়েছি তো একেবারে খোঁতা মুখ ভোঁতা করে?

বাঘ:

শোন মাসি ভালবাসি তাই বলছি তোমাকে

রূপ আছে বলে অপমান কোর না আর কাউকে

বেড়ালঃ যাও, যাও, যাও তো...

লাল্লা লাল্লা লাল্লা...

(পাখির ঢোকা)

বেড়ালঃ

ওরে পাখি, ওরে পাখি শুনে যা

একবার মুখ ফিরে চেয়ে যা

আমার রূপের ছটা দেখে যা

রূপের রানীকে আয় দেখে যা

পাখিঃ ওমা, এষে বেড়াল দিদি! আমি তো চিনতেই পারিনি।

বেড়ালঃ তা পারবি কেন? এখন যে আমাকে সুন্দর দেখতে হয়েছে।

পাখিঃ সত্যিই, কি সুন্দর দেখাচ্ছে গো তোমায়!

বেড়ালঃ তাও ত এখনো কিছুই সাজিনি রে, সিম্পিল রয়েছে। এখন যাহ, পালা

(পাখি চলে যায়)

লাল্লা লাল্লা লাল্লা...

(প্রজাপতি আসে)

বেড়ালঃ

ছিটপিটে রঙ মাথা সংটা

একটু কমা তোর ঢঙটা

রূপ কাকে বলে শুধু দেখে যা

একটু পাশে বসে ছুঁয়ে যা

প্রজাপতিঃ আরে, একে? এষে বেড়াল দিদি। কে সুন্দর দেখাচ্ছে গো তোমায়। আগে তো এমন ছিলে না।
কি করে এমন হলে গো?

বেড়ালঃ আমি তো এরকমই রে, চিরকাল বিউটিফুল। তোরা আগে পাতা দিতিস না তাই।

প্রজাপতিঃ সত্যিই কি সুন্দর...

বেড়ালঃ এখন ত এখানে দেখছিস, ক'দিন বাদে সিনেমায় নামব, তখন টিভি তে দেখবি। এখন যা তুই

(প্রজাপতি চলে যায়)

এরকমভাবে চলতে চলতে বেড়ালটা ভাবল, যাই নদীর জলে নিজের মুখটা দেখে আসি। না জানি আমায় কতো ভাল দেখতে লাগছে।

গান:

নদী নদী ছোট্ট নদী নদীর নাম যমুনা

নদীর জলে মুখটি দেখে বেড়ালের খুশী ধরে না

নিজেকে দেখে সাধ মেটে না নিজের রূপের ঘোর কাটে না

রূপসী একা আমি আর কেউ না

বেড়াল: (নদীর মাছেদের)

বলি ও মুখপোড়ার দল। বলি চোখে দেখতে পাস না? আমি যে এত সুন্দর একজন এতক্ষন নদীর পাড়ে দাঁড়িয়ে আছি দেখতে পাচ্ছিস না?

মাছ: তুই সুন্দর তাতে আমার কি? তুই সুন্দর ওই নিয়ে তুই থাক, আমাকে ডাকছিস কেন?

বেড়াল: ইইইইইসসস, হিংসুটে কোথাকার। এমন সুন্দর আগে কখনো দেখেছিস?

মাছ: তকে হিংসা করতে আমার বয়ে গেছে। ওই ত রূপ!

বেড়াল: কি বললি?

মাছ: ঠিকই তো বলেছি। ওই ছেলেটা/ মেয়েটা তোকে হাতে ধরে এত সুন্দর করে সাজিয়েছে, তাই তোর এত রূপ, তাই তুই সুন্দর। আমাকে সাজালে আমিও সুন্দর হতাম। হহ, নিজের তো ওই রূপের ছিরি! নিজের নেই কানাকড়ি, পরের ধনে পোদারি?

বেড়াল: খবরদার!

মাছ: কেন রে? কি করবি তুই?

কি করবি কি বলবি আয় দেখি দেব মার

পাড়ে বসে চোখ রাঙা এখানে শোন নেই পার

বেড়াল: তবে রে শয়তানি? দেখ তবে... (বেড়াল জলে ঝাঁপাল)

(জল থেকে কেবল কাঠামোটা উঠে আসে)

একি হল একি হল হয় রে

রঙ কোথা ধুয়ে গেল ভাইরে

আমার রূপের একি হাল রে

লজ্জায় আমি মরে যাই রে

পুতুলনাচিয়ে:

গল্পটা শেষ হল এখানেই

ভাল যদি লাগে তবে শিখে নে
আসল কথাটা হল এইটাই
নিজের সত্যি থেকে ভাল নেই ভাল নেই
রং-চং যত থাক ভাল নেই ভাল নেই
নিজের জোর ছাড়া আর কিছু ভাল নেই
সত্যি ছাড়া কিছু ভাল নেই ভাল নেই
ভাল নেই ভাল নেই
ভাল নেই ভাল নেই

রূপা হাতি(2004)

রূপকপুরের জঙ্গলেতে থাকত রূপা হাতি
কচিকাঁচা মিলে রূপার ছিল প্রচুর সাথী
পাখির সাথে ফুলের সাথে আকাশ বাতাস আর
রামধনুদের সবার সাথে বন্ধু ছিল তার
রূপা হাতি বন্ধু হাতি মিষ্টি হাতি রূপা হাতি
কিন্তু রূপার মনে সুখ নেই সে খালি ভাবে সবাইকে কি সুন্দর দেখতে আর আমি কি বিচ্ছিন্ন
মিষ্টি হাতি রূপার চোখও ভরল চোখের জলে
কাঁদতে দেখে বন্ধু টিয়া উড়াল দিয়া বলে
বন্ধু রূপা মিষ্টি রূপা একলা কাঁদার কারণ কি
কাঁদছ কেন সেই কথাটা বলতে আমায় বারণ কি
রূপা হাতি বন্ধু হাতি মিষ্টি হাতি রূপা হাতি
টিয়ার কথা শুনে রূপা বলল
রঙটা আমার নয় সুন্দর ভাই কাঁদছি আমি ভাই গো
তোর থেকে তুই একটুখানি সবুজ দে'না ভাই গো
বললে টিয়া গভীর কালো রঙটি শরীর জোড়া
শোভা বাড়ায় ধবধবে দাঁত জোপ্লা দিয়ে মোড়া
রূপা হাতি বন্ধু হাতি মিষ্টি হাতি রূপা হাতি

কিন্তু রূপা কোন কথাই শোনে না, সে খালি কাঁদে আর বলে
সবার আছে রঙিন জামা বনের সকল প্রাণী
সবাই ভাল বিদ্রী আমি এইটুকু সার জানি
রঙ যদি তুই নাও দিতে চাস আমার কথা মান রে
অন্য কারো কাছ থেকে তুই ধার করে রঙ আন রে
রূপা হাতি বন্ধু হাতি মিষ্টি হাতি রূপা হাতি
ছোট্ট টিয়া মিষ্টি টিয়া কিই বা করে আর
বন্ধু রূপার জন্যে সে রঙ আনতে গেল ধার
বাঘের কাছে চাইল ডোরা, চিতার কাছে টিপ গো
ময়ূর নিজের শ'তক রঙে আঁকলে হাতির পিঠ গো
রাঙলো রূপা নানান রঙে এমন কাও ভাই রে ভাই
একবাক্যে মানল সবাই এমন কভু দেখি নাই
রূপা হাতি বন্ধু হাতি মিষ্টি হাতি রূপা হাতি
যথা নিয়ম পুচুকু যারা এল দিনের শেষে
অবাক হলো দেখল যখন রূপাকে এই বেশে
বলল তারা বিদ্রী তুমি দেখলে লাগে ভয়
দৈত্য এটা এ আমাদের বন্ধু রূপা নয়
অবাক কাও ভাবল রূপা এত সাজের পরে
আমার ছোট্ট বন্ধুরা সব আমাকে ভয় করে?
মিষ্টি হেসে বলল টিয়া ভাবনা কোর না'কো
পদ্মঝিলের মধ্যেখানে একটু বসে থাকো
বাচ্চারা সব দেখবে ম্যাজিক একটুখানি রোসো
পদ্মঝিলের ধারে সবাই পা ঝুলিয়ে বস
পুকুর থেকে উঠল রূপা কিন্তু আরে এ কি
দৈত্য কোথায় সবাই যেন বন্ধু রূপাই দেখি
ছোট্টরা সব মাতল মজায় বন্ধু খুঁজে পেয়ে
হারিয়ে পাওয়ার সত্যি মজায় উঠল টিয়া গেয়ে

বুঝল হাতু রূপ বড় নয় সত্যি মনই বড়

সত্যি রূপা চাইলে হতে মন সুন্দর কর

সবাই মন সুন্দর কর

তাই মন সুন্দর কর

রূপা হাতি বন্ধু হাতি মিষ্টি হাতি রূপা হাতি

Appendix 4



Figure 3: Utensils and jute mattresses are coming from the decorators for the Camp



Figure 4: Benches are taken out of the rooms



Figure 5: Cleaning the rooms



Figure 6: On the first night-participants have come



Figure 7: Nimai Ghosh- the organiser and the cook



Figure 8: Washing the utensils after the meal



Figure 9: Morning Walk



Figure 10: Observing the nature



Figure 11: Singing during the morning walk



Figure 12: Collecting stuff for *Kutum Katam*



Figure 13: Exercise session



Figure 14: Line for morning tea

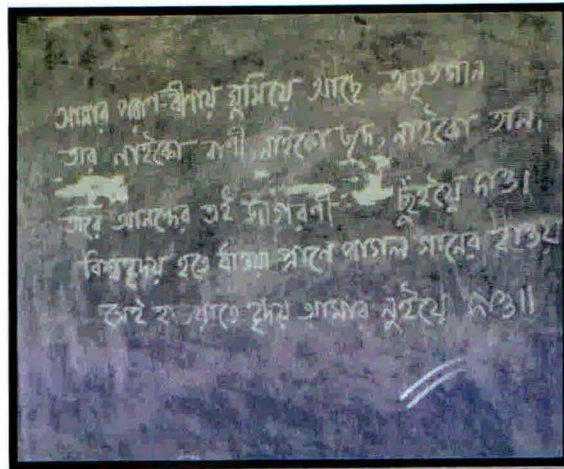


Figure 15: Song written in the board for the music session



Figure 16: A facilitator working with children



Figure 17: Mejos Working with children



Figure 18: Out of the rehearsal room

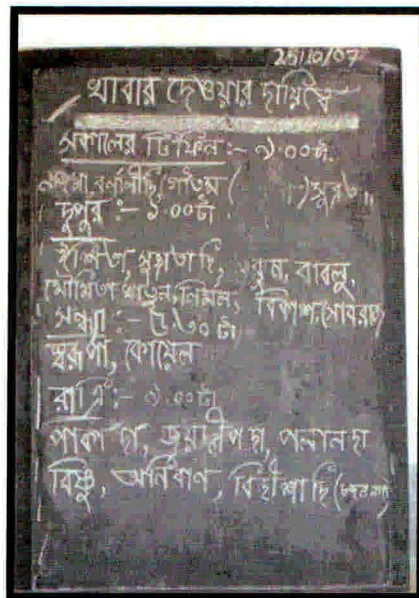


Figure 19: Names of the people in charge of meal that day



Figure 20: Children and their gloves puppets



Figure 21: Lunch time



Figure 22: The organisers



Figure 23: Play time in the afternoon



Figure 24: Discussion with the *Mejos* at night



Figure 25: The daily wall-magazine, *Kichir Michir*



Figure 26: Cleaning the school



Figure 27: Cleaning the periphery



Figure 28: Cleaning the road



Figure 29: Go-as-you-like



Figure 30: Go-as-you-like



Figure 31: A facilitator in go-as-you-like

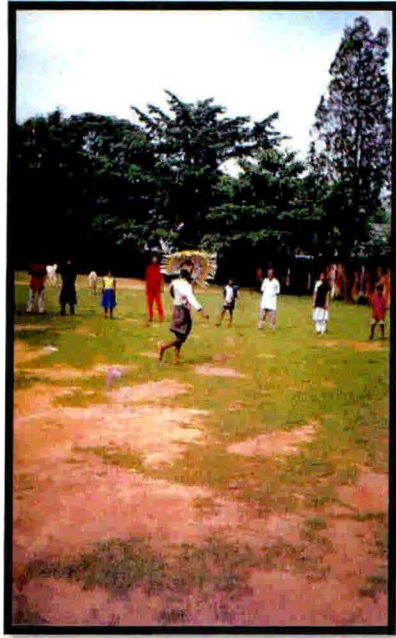


Figure 32: Initiation to Chhou

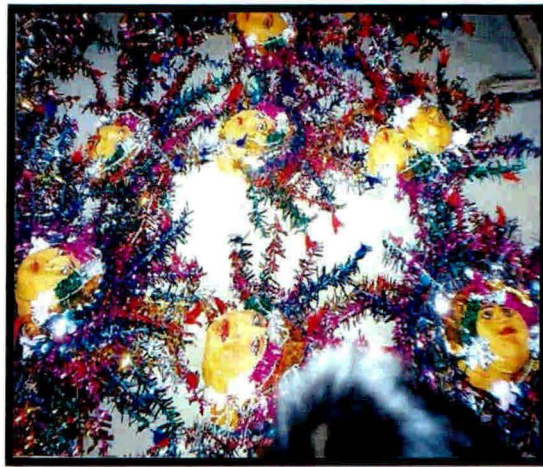


Figure 33: Chhou masks made by the participants



Figure 34: Tarini Mahato- the Chhou performer

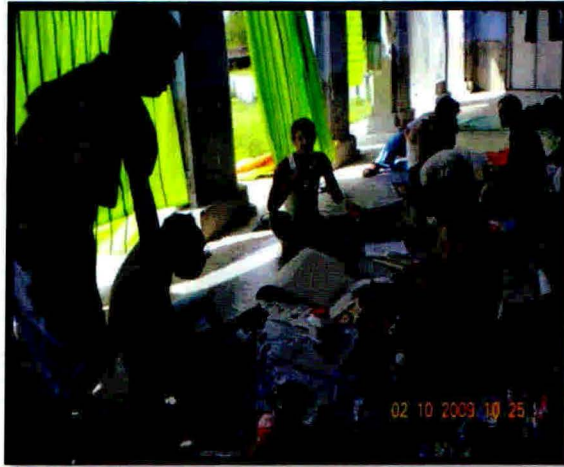


Figure 35: Sameer Chakraborty- in charge of stationaries



Figure 36: *Kutum Katam*



Figure 37: The *Pats* are yet to be painted

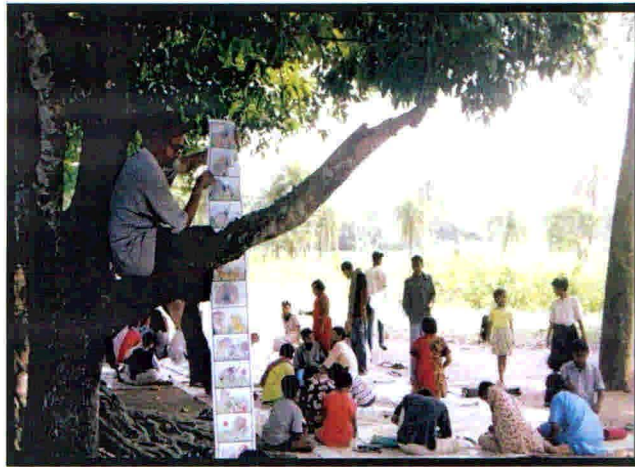


Figure 38: An organiser showing the painted *pats* to the participants

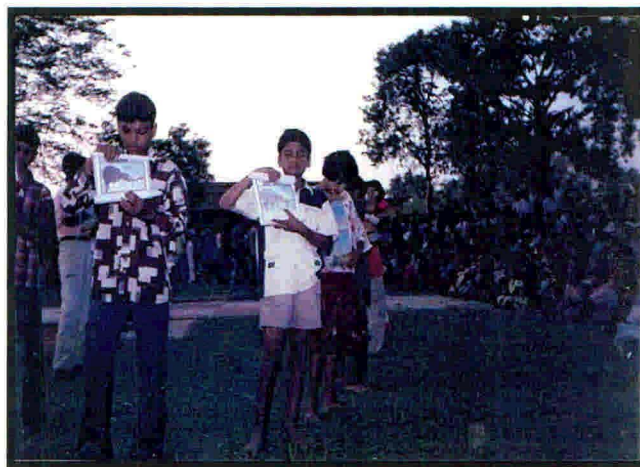


Figure 39: The *Pater Gaan*



Figure 40: Make up class



Figure 41: Instruments are coming for the final day

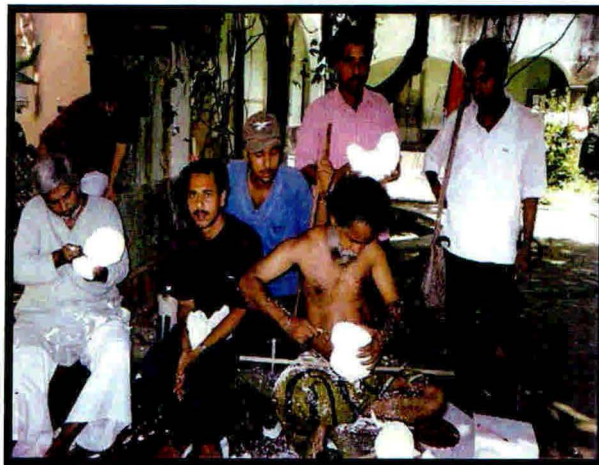


Figure 42: Making muppets



Figure 43: Rehearsal of flute playing



Figure 44: Rehearsal of the big play



Figure 45: Singing together before the show



Figure 46: Puppet show



Figure 47: Play by very young kids



Figure 48: Play



Figure 49: Play



Figure 50: Dance drama by the *Mejos*



Figure 51: A play done by the mothers of the children



Figure 52: Play



Figure 53: After play candle exchange



Figure 54: The play continues after the show is over