

Theatre, State and Policy: Institutional Assertions in Colonial and Postcolonial India

by Gargi Bharadwaj

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Theatre, State and Policy: Institutional Assertions in Colonial and Postcolonial India

A thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfilment of the award of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Theatre Arts

by

Gargi Bharadwaj



Department of Theatre Arts

Sarojini Naidu School of Arts & Communication, University of Hyderabad

(P.O.) Central University, Gachibowli, Hyderabad – 500 046, Telangana, India

July 2021

DECLARATION

I, Gargi Bharadwaj, hereby declare that this thesis titled **“Theatre, State and Policy: Institutional Assertions in Colonial and Postcolonial India”** submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Professor B. Ananthakrishnan is a bonafide research work which is also free from plagiarism. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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1. Gargi Bharadwaj & Upasana Mahanta (2021). “Space, time and the female body: New Delhi on foot at night” *Gender, Place & Culture*, DOI: 10.1080/0966369X.2021.1916447
2. Cherian E. Anita, and Gargi Bharadwaj (2020). "Constructing Genealogies of Disobedient Performance: Disappearance by/in the Media" *Performance Research* Vol. 24, No. 7: ‘On Disappearance’ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13528165.2019.1717869?needAccess=true> permanent link :<https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2019.1717869>)
3. Mahanta, Upasana, and Gargi Bharadwaj (2019). “Does Feminist Historiography Have An Emancipatory Potential?” *Economic and Political Weekly*. ENGAGE. Vol. 54, Issue No. 31, 03 Aug.
4. Bharadwaj, Gargi (2019). “Politics of Location: A View of Theatrical Contemporaneity in India” special issue on “Staging Change: Theatre in India” Vol 20, No.3, *Marg Magazine*

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6. Bharadwaj, Gargi, and Lonneke van Heugten (2017). "Co-curating the Curriculum: On the Poli- tics of International Performance Pedagogy." *International Performance Research Pedagogies*. Palgrave Macmillan.

The student has presented research papers in the following conferences:

1. Asia Pacific Public Policy Network Conference, University of Western Australia, Perth (13,14 February, 2020) Paper title: "Policy of Culture, Culture in Policy: Evidence in/of Cultural Policy Analysis in India".
2. Paper presentation at 'Imagining New Communities: Theatres of Emergency' Seminar at 12th International theatre festival of Kerala (ITFOK), Thrissur on the 23rd January 2020. Paper title: "Action in Times of Ordinary Emergencies: Cementing Community through Collective Pedagogy".
3. Sexing South Asia: Law, Activism and Sexual Justice Conference, Delhi, July 19-20. 2019 Paper title: "Body and Resilience in Contemporary Performance"
4. International Federation of Theatre Research (IFTR), on "Theatre and Stratification", University of Warwick, UK, July, 28-1 August, 2014. Paper title: "Mapping terrains of National Cultural Policy in India".

5. Indian Society of Theatre Research (ISTR) annual conference, University of Hyderabad, India, January, 28-30, 2011. Paper title: “Displacement, Identity and Translation: Performing Jameela”

Further, the student has passed the following courses towards fulfilment of coursework requirement for Ph.D.

Course Code	Name	Credits	Pass/fail
TA 802	Arts and the World-Literary/ Visual/ Cultural Theory	4	Pass
TA 811	Performance Theories and Issues in Indian Theatre	4	Pass
TA 812	Mapping the Question (Exploring the topic with supervisor)	4	Pass
TA 801	Research Methodology	4	Pass

Supervisor

Head of Department

Dean of School

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Introduction

The paradigm of institution-building in newly independent India sought to place culture as the kernel of democratic policies, to give shape to a ‘national culture’. The beginnings of a policy framework in performing arts can be traced back to the setting up of central cultural institutions, particularly the Sangeet Natak Akademi (established in 1953), and the allied political and administrative processes that brought culture into the ambit of state control. The process was to construct a ‘national culture’ through performance traditions, institutional interventions, and state funding in order to evolve cultural institutions as the new framework of institutions that embodied the “spirit of progress or,...[its] synonym, modernity” (Partha Chatterjee, 2010, 53). The twin processes of creating new modern institutions and engaging with the already existing ones that supported artistic forms and expressions prior to independence was crucial to the process of institutionalisation of culture. National institutions in newly independent India were thereby created out of former colonial institutions and their archaeological and ethnographic collections. Some of the prominent art and cultural institutions were—the National Museum (1949); National Gallery of Modern Art, Sahitya Akademi, and Lalit Kala Akademi (all set up in 1954 following a Parliamentary Resolution); Indian Council of Cultural Relations (1950); the Film Institute of India and the National School of Drama (both set up in 1959); and the National Institute of Design (1961). They were products of a process of claiming back cultural history and colonial infrastructure by the nation state. Part of this process was also the desire to build competencies in the areas of collecting, categorising, and preserving cultural artefacts. The foundations of a national arts/cultural policy are laid in these early efforts to institutionalise the arts, as Geeta Kapur points out, “pre-

cisely to carry out the overall mandate of modernization.” (2000, 202). India’s first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru’s vision of a socialist democratic country committed to nation-building and nationalism within a global modernist context and belief in the values of liberal democracy, became an influential strand of the patronage-based approach towards the arts.

Cultural practices were seen as tools for shaping a disciplined national citizenry that were deeply intertwined with the processes of nation-building. Theatre and performance, as a subcategory of the ‘Art and Culture’ portfolio, were tied intricately to the task of contributing to national culture and legacy, aimed at constructing a unique national identity, whether real or imagined. Those forms of art that appeared to embody this spirit and purpose were recognised, patronised, and promoted by the state and its institutions. It is perhaps for this reason that ‘traditional’ performing art forms (both ‘folk’ and ‘classical’) find disproportionate focus in the founding documents of institutions like SNA. The notion(s) of ‘culture’ in arts and cultural policy discourse since independence has been so caught up with ‘tradition’ that no policy statement or practice model retains importance (especially in institutional history and memory) outside the framework of tradition or a negotiation with it, even if perfunctory. There is no categorical mention or definitive space for ‘contemporary’ expressions in the SNA documents from the foundational years of its existence. Even between forms, classical dance and music and later folk forms of theatre take precedence over modernist practices of theatre. Theatre practitioners and policymakers at the time of Indian independence saw theatre as one of the most important art forms for remoulding our society and for restoring some semblance of control and stability in national life. This may have to do both with the symbolic power of theatre to embody the present and its capacity “...[to actualize and officialize] visions of the world and political divisions” (Bourdieu, 1991,

130). The distinctions between forms and genres on the basis of region, lineage, and cultural representativeness came to determine if the state would engage with and patronise the form, thereby setting the dominant paradigms in theatre and performance practice.

One of the transformed contexts of social and political organisation impacting the existence of the arts was that of patronage. Newly formed institutions like the SNA occupied the space vacated by the colonial state and the erstwhile princely states to become the new patron and administrator of the arts. It had to negotiate with pre-existing regional institutions and, through a system of affiliation and recognition, validate its status as the centralising force for culture in the new regime. This also became a modality of power in the hands of the state to legitimise itself as the benefactor of the arts and its resources. The extension of the notion of planning and development to the domain of culture makes visible the various governmental, economic, linguistic, and social negotiations towards creating a national culture for a newly independent nation aspiring to modernity. Within the context of planned national development, culture occupied a significant place. Even while it was subordinated under the broad rubric of 'Education' in the first two Five-Year Plan documents and various forms of art bracketed under the 'Art and Culture' portfolio later, it was anything but marginal. The cultural project of nationalism in post-colonial contexts, Partha Chatterjee reminds us, is to produce a distinct modernity. Language, literature, social institutions of the university and the family were imagined as modalities of an emergent identity that was neither western nor entirely traditional (1993, 7-9). Central to this process was the desire to construct new aesthetic form(s) of novel, visual art (Bengal school) and most pertinently, modern urban theatre, that was "modern and national, and yet recognizably different from the western", and "clearly distinguishable from folk theatre" (ibid., 8). With industri-

alisation as a key goal of state planning, industrial production, educational, and professional sectors were deemed to be modern sectors. The arena of culture, on the other hand, was considered traditional where state intervention would be limited to selective patronage and protection. Since the representative character of the modern sector as the leading element within the nation has to be legitimised precisely through traditional means, arts and performance came to stand in as the face of a modern India, reinforcing the idea of the nation that was traditional in its values and essence, yet modern in its approach. Sudipta Kaviraj argues that the first decade after independence irreversibly altered the character of the state from a “spectacular, mysterious and distant agency” to something vast, over extended, extremely familiar at least in its sordid everyday structures (1997, 243). Culture and artistic production became crucial to the rational universalism of the state that saw culture as a pedagogic and uniting tool.

The techniques of power adopted by the post-colonial state were not entirely novel. They were expanded, rather than transformed, versions of the basic institutional arrangements of colonial law and administration. The newly reorganised nation neither broke away from existing institutional structures of colonial rule, nor did it dismantle pre-existing structures of power and the dominance of landed classes in the countryside. Many of these would coincide with local centres of power from where traditional performance forms and their practitioners drew forms of financial support and patronage. The ideological positions and institutional moves of the state in these foundational years establish the architecture of the (postcolonial) state, cultural nationalism, and the arts. In terms of artistic forms and communities, it meant resorting to feudal notions of patronage and protection in a caste and class based hierarchical society. The gist of this within the context of a welfare state concerns the arms-length approach of the state that functions through

SNA that has been the main recipient of funding and government directives in performing arts including theatre.

The Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA) was set up in 1953 in New Delhi as the premier state institution for the performing arts in India. This was one of the first policy driven steps taken towards exploring and prospecting an 'Indian' performance culture. SNA became the first post-independence state institution in charge of the maintenance, development, and sustenance of the performing arts. Its institutional history and centrality within the network of cultural institutions set up in these foundational years influenced the attitude of the state and the orientation of its implicit policies on culture that were, to some extent, already embedded in the Indian constitution. I call its policies implicit since no formal policy document for the arts, or culture in general, exists in India, articulated neither in the founding documents of SNA nor elsewhere. Despite this, SNA interventions and initiatives on theatre and its terms of discourse encapsulated in its various reports offer significant insights into how theatre became institutionalised and shaped into a national cultural form that would be funded, programmed, and promoted by the state. In that, SNA's role has not been limited only to defining an authentic theatrical present and future, but more crucially, as Anita Cherian reminds us, in crafting a theatrical past (2009, 57). This process has been laden with exclusions of theatrical expressions and movements, particularly of popular and hybrid theatre forms like the professional Parsi theatre and its regional variants on the one hand, and effacing the legacies of political theatre conceptualised and produced by the IPTA in the early 1940s, on the other. This study considers the process of policy-making and its implementation, i.e., SNAs administrative, aesthetic, and ideological interventions in the realm of theatre as not only the most historically prominent mediations in the field, but also as cultural-polit-

ical acts in themselves. For the state, these have certainly been the very embodiments of 'Indian' culture.

The national Akademies¹ that housed 'arts and culture' were from their very inception placed within the Ministry of Education (until 1961) and later in the Department of Culture (set up in 1971) located within it. The portfolio underwent several changes in ministerial allocation during this period² and much later also. It was only in 2001 that it was placed under the newly formed body for the arts, the Ministry of Culture, under which the SNA now functions as an autonomous body. The shuttling of 'culture' between different ministerial heads underlines the shifting understandings of its definition and role in order to accommodate institutional invention of forms and reproduction of cultural classifications. The distinction between what was understood as 'culture' located under the Ministry of Education, and that 'Culture' which was reconstituted and located under the newly created Department of Culture are instructive here. While the broad category of 'culture' under the Ministry of Education referred to all the different levels and types of education, both formal, informal³ and artistic, its relocation under the 'Department of Culture' condensed it only to the 'artisanal'. The latter was meant to concern itself only with schemes of archaeology, archives, libraries, expertise, museums, art galleries⁴ and state Akademis that drew upon colonial disciplines of Anthropology, Museology, Art History, and Ar-

¹ Lalit Kala Akademi, Sahitya Kala Akademi, and the Sangeet Natak Akademi as the academies of fine, literary, and performing arts respectively.

² The period between 1961-1971 saw culture being managed by the Ministry of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs and then shortly in the name of *Sanskriti Vibhag* (Cultural Department). Until the Ministry came into being, Culture was reassigned several times from the Ministry of Education and Culture, Cultural Affairs, Human Resource Development to the Ministry of Culture, Youth Affairs and Sports, and finally to the Ministry of Tourism and Culture.

³ Central Advisory Board of Education [CABE] Standing Committee Proceedings, 1973, pg 83-87

⁴ Recommendation of the Fifth Five-Year Plan's Task Force on Culture.

chaeology. Under this new nomenclature, cultural activity was orientated towards researching, displaying, and promoting artistic practices that date back to the past. Ashish Rajadhyaksha et al. note that it was the areas of social sciences, the "more nationalist disciplines" that were to find place within the framework of Education, now tasked with carrying out future-oriented research through various Councils and research centres (IFACCA, WorldCP-Asia International Database of Cultural Policies, 2013, 13). Furthermore, the distinctions between 'art' and 'culture' have been crucial to their location within the nation's planning priorities. Art, located in the akademies and falling under the rubric of Education, was seen to be composed of fine arts and performing arts, focussing particularly on classical forms. Culture, on the other hand, referred to a range of creative and artisanal practices associated with livelihood of the folk and tribal populations and included activities like handicraft, textile, handloom, etc. and was considered the business of any/all ministerial bodies. The administrative shuttling of culture across diverse policy heads and a lack of critical analysis of these moves limits the policy discourse to the absence of a coherent and unitary statement(s) or documents rather than seeing it as a complex, and often mutually contradictory set of administrative mechanisms and ideological frameworks. Moreover, the abstract distinctions between art and culture ensured that the performing arts remained isolated from academic research and critical inquiry⁵.

The long reluctance to create a separate body exclusively for the arts is reflected in the lack of political will towards creating a ministry level organisation. The antagonism towards this

⁵ The High Powered Committee Report, 2014 observed that SNA's expenditure on academic work as a percentage of its total expenditure has been coming down resulting in an increasing gap between practitioners of the performing arts and theoreticians (2014, 42).

move came particularly from the faction of cultural intelligentsia⁶ that considered the bureaucratism of a 'ministry' of culture as a means of direct state control of cultural activities and therefore inimical to creativity and institutional autonomy of the arts. More recently, artists, cultural administrators, and scholars have opposed the idea of a 'national' cultural policy in seminars and consultations debating the idea of legislating a 'national' culture, cautioning against homogenisation, and instrumentalisation of culture. Even while the state has historically been the prime patron of the arts, actively intervening in policymaking, particularly in theatre, the larger discourse on state interventions in arts and culture has oscillated largely between the foundational debate about the need for a national cultural policy, and what the limitations or dangers of instituting one could be. There has been a complete disengagement with the existing institutional frames and allocated edifices that exist despite the absence of a coherent and clearly written cultural policy and impact theatre practice in significant ways. The inherent contradiction between the welfare state agendas of patronage and support to marginal art practices, and, the policy actions of the developmental state that emphasize modern industrial expansion, tourism, science, and technology also remain unaccounted for in policy research and analysis.

Objective and Scope of the Study

This study builds on the premise that in the absence of a clearly written and well-articulated unitary cultural policy in independent India, what constitutes an amorphous national policy with respect to theatre and performance are a body of documents that emerge from seminars,

⁶ The proceedings of First Drama Seminar, 1956 record the strong rejection of this idea by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and echoed by others like Krishna Menon. The appeals for state support for the arts without the existence of a ministry of culture to oversee the administration of culture, to coordinate and lead the efforts of the institutions it controls, points towards an ambivalent position regarding the role of the state and its bureaucratic wings towards the functioning of cultural institutions.

consultations, and official positions of the Sangeet Natak Academy (SNA). Despite this challenge, culture has been integral to the idea of national development in India; and the arts have been a crucial site for reinforcing the idea of the nation (Cherian, 2009, 33). Within theatre, this body of institutional records and pronouncements constitute an unwritten state policy on the present and future of modern Indian theatre. This study maps a broad historical trajectory of state policy making in theatre—from the late nineteenth century assertions of the colonial state through the iniquitous regulations on dramatic performances (Dramatic Performances Act, 1876) to the formation of the Indian state in 1947 and the foundational years of the existence and functioning of its prime cultural institution, the SNA from 1953-1985. From this broad historical canvas, I draw out important institutional moves and discourses that impact theatre and performance practice and their systems of transmission indirectly but in very poignant ways. This includes crucial foreign policy positions, concerns of national planning and its rationales, and Five-Year Plans. These myriad archival sources are situated contextually within the developmental discourses of the newly independent nation state, allowing the research to subject explicit and implicit policy pronouncements to critical permutations. I aim to construct a historical narrative of cultural policy of the foundational years of the representative institutional model for this study, the SNA, to understand its key policies, administrative and implementation mechanisms. I also analyse the rationales behind the institutional segregation of responsibilities between SNA and other governmental bodies that manage, protect, and promote theatre. This exercise is not only possible but also necessary to problematise the underlying foundational assumptions and debates about culture and its role in a postcolonial society and helps chart the historical equations between theatre and the making of the nation-state. In the process, I engage with the discourses of

tradition, modernity, authenticity, and Indianness that are of relevance to cultural policy in post-colonial contexts and discuss issues of democratization and decentralization of cultural governance, equity, and access to cultural resources that have informed policymaking and implementation in India in fundamental ways.

Existing Literature and Relevant Debates

Tied to notions of administration, management, and planning, (public) policy when linked to the notion of culture, equally echoes modern discourses of development, social equity, and the functioning of a democratic nation state. ‘Culture’ in policy discourses generally refers to its eighteenth-nineteenth century usage that conjoins it with civilization, referring to all patterns of behaviour and the ‘ways of life’ issues of a people, including language policy, social exclusion, and inequality. Broadly understood as the complex process(es) of formulation, implementation, and infrastructural support towards cultural activity, cultural policy both as policy advisory work as well as theoretical analysis, concerns itself quite centrally with the relationship between state and culture—with what policymaking bodies (governments and non-state actors) envision and enact in terms of cultural activity. Here cultural activity relates to, following Raymond Williams, “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity” (1985, 90). Following this, studying state or national cultural policy would mean analysing how governments approach the arts, promote, patronise, and regulate areas of artistic practice including creative processes of art making, heritage and conservation, and their diverse expressions. An interpretative approach towards policy acknowledges that policy processes are not merely concerned with the linear transmission and implementation of decisions of single, autonomous actors called gov-

ernments in a top-down fashion. Rather, it is constituted by an array of diverse voices, agendas, historical actors, and contexts that contend for attention and resources and the ability to define the very problem that policy actions seek to address. The process of policy is therefore always integrated into the power structure of society; it does not function separately but is influenced by national-global developments and power relations.

Cultural policy studies have often been understood as unpacking cultural politics that inevitably evokes and involves attention to the “clash of ideas, institutional struggles and power relations” that affect and manifest in the production and circulation of culture and its social-symbolic meanings (McGuigan, 1996, 1). Mulcahy understands it not as an administrative matter alone, but rather reflective of a *Weltanschauung*, or, the worldview that illustrates the “character of a society and how its citizenry define themselves” (Mulcahy, 2017, viii). It has also been examined as a site that produces cultural citizenship, where the ‘cultural system’ as a whole provides ways of understanding oneself in relation to the cultural ‘other’, and the rationales for the conduct of individuals, institutions and states towards culture (Miller, T., 2001; Bennett, T., 1998; Rodriguez and Gonzales, 1995). Central to the discourse on cultural policy, globally, have been questions of whether culture should be policed at all, that is, whether it should be valued for its own worth and supported by the public exchequer or should it be understood and managed as being instrumental to social and economic policy ends. The latter has contributed to thinking in terms of usefulness or ‘economic value’ of culture in the subfields of cultural economics, arts management, etc. These approaches limit the understanding of culture to the instrumental contribution that it can make to other policy agendas and pose challenges of valuation, evaluation, and assessment of policy outcomes and their effectiveness. It is only when seen beyond the economic

analysis of spending that cultural policy analysis allows for understanding the historical, political, cultural, and administrative contexts in which policies are created and implemented. This helps centering not only what is proclaimed and explicitly articulated as a policy goal but also its historical dimensions, processes of implementation, thereby aligning policy positions with practices and ideologies not explicitly stated in policy documents. Other equally pressing concerns emerge from following this line of inquiry- *whose* culture needs to be preserved, supported, and sustained? How are hierarchies of high-art and popular culture created? Whether cultural patronage can be understood within the binaries of public versus private investments or how the status of old cultural institutions stands vis-a-vis the new ones? And more broadly how culture can positively influence levels of social well-being. Relatedly, consumption of art and culture are not immune to cultural preferences, tastes, and notions of pleasure and aesthetics but rather “predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfilling the social function of legitimating social differences” (Bourdieu, 1984, 7). They underscore the neglect and denial of the popular—the lower, coarse, vulgar forms of performance—and the affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, distinguished pleasures forever proscribed to the profane (ibid.).

National policy frameworks for arts and culture globally have been linked to the development of the nation state and new forms of nationalism (McGuigan, 1996 and Craik, 2007). The rise of secessionist movements in the second half of the twentieth century also explains the appeals to culture and creation of national cultural institutions to assert a sense of collective identity as part of the process of acquiring political consensus for sovereignty, statehood, or freedom. Post World War imperatives of global geo-politics shaped disparate and sundry government ac-

tions on culture, positioning it as an important site of contest of identity within national boundaries and between world powers. The politics of culture has since been integral to international relations and the need to recognise local, regional, and national actions within a coherent policy framework has been recognised⁷. As a twentieth century phenomena, the thinking of/about nations through culture became a part of the welfare state agenda, whose institutionalisation as a domain of public policy marks a profound difference between the relationship of the state to culture from earlier historical periods. UNESCO's Roundtable of Monaco, 1967 articulated the idea of cultural needs or, 'culture-as-a-need' for a global context, underlining questions of its democratisation through ensuring access and equity of culture to all and participation of all in cultural action⁸ (UNESCO, 1969, 13-14). It also advocated for integrating evaluation and research within the planning process of cultural policy (ibid., 48-49). This move determined the course of several national cultural policy frameworks and initiated the process of compiling a series of national cultural policy profiles⁹. Despite the limitations of this exercise of national representation and the absence of any objective or critical analysis of cultural politics in national contexts, Rosenstein

⁷ It was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) of the United Nations that recognised cultural rights and elaborated basic human rights in terms of their cultural dimension for a global context.

⁸ The UNESCO Working document establishes a fertile relationship between cultural needs and cultural policy. The latter follows from the recognition that societies and people have cultural needs that must be ascertained and synthesised in acts of planning and formulating policy action (Silva, T. Gabriela, 2015, 11). This trend of conjoining culture with education began in the 1950's and is evident in the UNESCO declarations of 1967 that acknowledge the absence of necessary levels of education as a rationale for nation states to intervene in creating enabling conditions for the masses to develop their personality to the full and to participate substantively in cultural activities (11-12).

⁹ India's profile, entitled 'Some Aspects of Cultural Policy in India' was written by the arts scholar and cultural bureaucrat Kapila Vatsyayan. The document focuses on the exceptionality of the Indian civilisation and its 'national culture' described in terms of heritage of the past, traditional arts and skills despite the low priority it receives from the government in the face of pressing social, economic, and developmental challenges (1972). This document was followed by *Country Profile: India* commissioned by World Cultural Policy-Asia and written by Ashish Rajadhyaksha, P. Radhika, and Raghavendra Tenkayala of the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society (2013). This document includes a more updated list of institutions and developments in the field of culture and provides an analysis of how cultural policy has broadly shaped through the periods of development, autonomy, and globalisation from the 1950s to the 2000s. The current research draws upon the information and observations from this document.

has argued that it served a crucial function in establishing the basic cultural policy norm —that nations did have cultural policies. Along with this, it also defined the challenges culture faced—of extinction and erasure, its underdeveloped state and the reality of its uneven distribution across society and between nations (2018, 54-55).

Culture Policy: Examining Postcolonial Impulses and Nationalist Drives

In postcolonial contexts, policies in art and culture seem inseparable from the questions of political and ideological dispositions of postcolonial nationalism, and most significantly to cultural histories. As an arrangement of systemic dominance that creates a set of asymmetrical relationships, colonialism was not only a political and economic, but also a cultural phenomenon. For Said, crucial to the connection between culture and imperialism is the ensuing power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging (Said, 1979, xiii). Newly independent societies often devise ways to salvage their voice in telling their own stories that had been muzzled and overpowered by conditions of colonialism reflecting the post-colonial desire for cultural sovereignty that follows political independence. Frantz Fanon argues that the tendencies of colonialism extend beyond the present and future of the colonised people, to their past that distorts, disfigures, and destroys it (1994, 51). Reclaiming this silenced past by a newly independent people is a necessary element for regaining political sovereignty. Romila Thapar posits that, “culture in relation to tradition links the past to the present”, thereby bringing the historical context at par with the cultural form (1987, 3-4). For the decolonized, policies of cultural restoration and reclaiming their cultural identity have been complementary to processes of political and social reconstruction. Cultural policies in erstwhile colonies are therefore not limited in their concern for and support of the arts, but entail addressing major political concepts and redressing

legacies of coloniality (Mulcahy, 2010, 157). One such strand in postcolonial thinking about culture has been the dominant discourse of tradition.

The questions of pure traditions and their uninterrupted continuity have been at the heart of the search for identity, particularly national identities in post-colonial contexts. This search for pristine and authentic traditions has inevitably launched processes of interpreting the past and invariably led to the invention of new traditions. Traditions are often only contemporary desires and anxieties fashioned on the way the past has been interpreted. Traditions, as Eric Hobsbawm argues, are “invented, constructed and formally instituted” before they get established in continuity with a suitable historical past (1992, 1). This phenomenon has been historically connected with nineteenth and twentieth century processes of state-building and nationalism. Even the term *parampara*, the Hindi word closest to the English language term ‘tradition’—the handing down of knowledge, cultural practices and techniques—assumes a fixity and dogmatism fundamentally incongruent with the act of handing down practices from one generation and social group to another. In cultural practice, however, the introduction of change, interpolations, and reinterpretations impact traditions and artistic practices, sometimes altering them beyond recognition. Equally, some practices of the past may be recalled, selectively reinserted into the flow of tradition, and ascribed as the central or defining aspect of tradition. The value, force, and power of cultural traditions and forms is often considered a function of their unchanging character, linking them with the historical past, promising a present better than the one that exists. Post-colonial nations have often indulged in this exercise of nation-building through a rhetoric of pure tradition, discarding all that which has accrued over time through borrowing and inter-mixing. ‘National’ cultural forms are thus solidified in the popular imagination and their distinctions from the ‘colo-

nial' further sharpened, thereby actively producing the character of the independent nation in/through tradition. These are also grounds ripe for how Said understands the creation of a pantheon of myths that propagate more congenial origins than complex colonial histories of culture would allow for (Said, 1994, 226-27). The myths of authenticity and national identity/nationness claim to select indigenous practices, especially those that can be dated to antiquity and presented as pure and ideal for the present and future of the nation and its cultural identity. Therefore, often policies that focus on these forms from the past and assert pressure upon the discourse of national identity become crucial as acts of decolonisation. They come to control the definition of identity itself. Alongside fashioning a post-colonial present, erstwhile colonised nations seek to create history afresh in a way that their new political status may seem authentic, thereby legitimizing the new regime (Mulcahy, 2017, 101). Existing theories of nationalism amply demonstrate that national identity cannot be assumed to be given or fixed. Policy actions and declamations of cultural entities and institutions become the agents through which national identity is actively produced and reproduced. Even though culture constitutes an important arena for the assertion of a modern national identity, arts and cultural policy discourse in India seems to be locked into the nuances of the past (tradition) rather than the present (contemporary). Furthermore, this seems to be the case in the realm of culture and the arts far more than in other policy arenas like health or scientific advancement.

The operating framework for arts and culture policy in post-independence India was premised, at least in part, on the discourse of apathy and neglect of the colonial state towards indigenous traditions. The decline of royal patronage for the traditional forms of music and dance with the advent of British colonialism adversely affected forms of theatre and performance and

the livelihoods of its practitioners. Most theatre forms in these contexts were interlinked and composite performances integrating elements of dance, music, and theatre, rather than discrete systems of expression making the distinction between theatre (referring to the text based dramatic presentation) and performance (referring to the oral, body centred, and interdisciplinary forms) difficult to hold. The field of culture had also been subjected to abrupt and extreme forms of colonial censorship and control. Marginalisation of folk theatre and degradation of social practices associated with it was part of a cultural 'othering' of ways of life distinct from the Western universality of aesthetics, cultural experience, and value system. The former due to its relationship with the written word has been given precedence over the latter, considered representative of primitive societies that had no literacy, no literature and therefore no history or culture. Added to this was the existence of new and hybrid performance cultures that developed alongside colonial modernity, often as admixtures of traditional and modern European cultural forms, increasingly used in national cultural movements. Their hybridity, resistance towards formalistic classification, uneasy repurposing of tradition, myth and history for anti-colonial and anti-imperialist ends, made them unpalatable to the nation state's cultural proposals for modernity. The bourgeois nationalist state, in its post colonial formation, was not only suspicious of these cultural forms but also associated moral and aesthetic corruption to them, discounting their role in evoking a national consciousness and deriding their popular audience base.

The idea of arts and culture appealed to the Indian post-colonial state as a means of developing a cultivated and civilised population, as well as building a national culture. For purposes of cultural policy, this implied allowing common cultural practices, beliefs and customs to exist and manifest (Alexander, 1995, 216). Through the invention of the categories of folk and clas-

sical forms of performance, either previously neglected or marginalized, an authentic identity through native cultural traditions was sought to be constructed. Equally important was SNAs impetus to parallel the nation-state's efforts to forge relationships with the newly formed regional states (Cherian, 2009, 40). The notion of a 'national theatre' as a sum total of regional theatres became central to crafting a singular undivided nation and a focal point of its institutional interventions in theatre. And yet for all its centrality within the Nehruvian imagination of nation building, the making of cultural policy has proceeded without a written policy statement or articulation of its intended goals, in largely commonsensical, un-reflexive ways that signal the disjuncture between this unarticulated cultural policy, institutional structures and acts of policy-making (Bharadwaj, 2019, 65-66). National cultural policy thinking in a multi-ethnic nation like India, as policy scholar Veena Naregal points, has missed a cultural historical perspective that can account for the significance and complexity of the early decades of the 1940s and 50s in defining the avenues and categories of patronage at the regional and national levels (2008, 33-34). Policy discourse is yet to address how notions of development, modernity, and citizenship created hierarchies of cultural expression in the post independence period and determined how and which forms will be inscribed within official frameworks and qualify for protection and patronage by the Central Akademi and its regional offshoots (ibid.). Despite the postcolonial urge to explore an 'Indian' idiom in all fields of cultural practice, there has not been any comprehensive policy enactment in Parliament to recognise and address the diversity of existing cultural practices. Altogether, ambiguities about the nature of state involvement in performing arts and creation of a subsidized theatre; its initiatives of publication, preservation, and documentation of traditional theatre forms; and a rationale of infrastructural support and patronage form the foun-

dational elements of an amorphous cultural policy. This has also led to a certain pre-modern understanding of traditional cultural forms as classical and timeless, even as traditions continue to be invented. Cultural practice itself has come to be seen as a genteel pursuit that does not expect any returns, disengaging spectatorship from the material realities of production, and situating theatre practice far from a professional space, as well as any critical discourse.

Even though they often inherited a cultural landscape animated by significant cultural institutions at the sub-national level, cultural development and its administration in postcolonial contexts has been anything but even. Even in India, the independent nation's cultural foundations were based on the asymmetrical growth of traditional art and performance practices between regions, maldistribution of training and skills, and acute poverty of means to innovate and sustain cultural forms. One of the other common trends and processes of cultural policy-making and implementation in postcolonial nations has been the proximity between the portfolios of education and culture. Education has had important cultural functions and culture has often been intended to play a pedagogic role. Common to many national contexts has been the late emergence of a Ministry of Culture as a result of a separation or reorganization of an older Ministry of Education. In India, culture and education had been linked together from the very beginning and their purposes were often described in identical terms. This process dates back to colonial times when language, literature, and culture provided the vortex around which educational policies were formed. The Department of Culture, from its very inception, was located in the Ministry of Education, acquiring an administrative identity of its own only in 1985 when the state linked its neoliberal policies on education with industry and placed culture under the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The ensuing emphasis on development, teaching programmes in science

and technology and the focus on social science research, divorced culture from public policy thinking, pushing those disciplines that came to be linked with culture to the periphery (IFACC-CA, WorldCP-Asia International Database of Cultural Policies, 2013, 151).

The Indian constitution defines culture as the responsibility of the Union and the state/local legislations and lays down the guiding principles that govern the actions and interventions of the Indian state towards protection of art, culture and heritage as a shared notion of ‘cultural responsibility’¹⁰. Newly independent nations coming out of colonial dominance have often tended to veer towards a system of cultural governance where powers are distributed between the federal and sub-national legislatures through constitutional provisions, albeit not always explicitly stated or equally balanced between centre and the states. Even though this system proposes an equal and symmetrical disposition between the federal and sub-national governments, policy scholar Jonathan Paquette argues that “its orientation is defined in terms of national responsibility rather than insisting on regional characteristics” (2019, 50). The aspiration to create a national culture through institutions set up in the capital city of the new nation has often been critiqued on account of concentration of resources and issues of centralisation of power and bureaucratisation. In India, a number of national cultural institutions created at the federal level and located in New Delhi have been publicly funded through the arm’s length approach. Based on the principle of *laissez-faire*, or free enterprise, this corresponds to government allocation of fixed amounts of

¹⁰ The division and balance of powers and responsibilities within a federal structure is an important source of ascertaining the position of culture as a subject of governmental planning and action. The Seventh Schedule of the Indian constitution provides for a division of powers between central and state governments and differentiates spending between them (Article 246, List-II, 33). List II, the state list of the schedule includes ‘Theatres and dramatic performances’ as well as sports, entertainments and amusements, along with libraries, museums and other similar institutions, ancient and historical monuments and records other than those to be of national importance, are the responsibility of the state governments to support and legislate upon by the state. States also benefited from earnings by collecting taxes on ‘luxuries’ that include taxes on entertainments, amusements, betting and gambling etc. See Chapter 4 for a discussion on censorship and entertainment tax.

money to an arts institution at the federal level that plans and disburses them on its behalf along with determining the broad outcomes for which funds are provided. Even though this approach emanates, at least in part, from the post-colonial desire to create democratic cultural institutions that can function independently from the strains of political processes, several state art and cultural academies/agencies at the federal level suffer from over-bureaucratisation and politicisation, ultimately defeating the purpose of aiding flourishing of the arts.

In post-independence India, culture was brought directly under the aegis of the federal state and cultural responsibilities were defined broadly as the business of the central government. Reports of various high-powered committees set up to review governmental functioning of various institutions of the Ministry of Culture, especially the three Akademis, articulate a critique of this state of cultural administration. The first ever review of the three cultural academies and National School of Drama, the Homi Bhabha Committee Report, 1964 underscores crucial issues related to administration of culture—autonomy and accountability in regular functioning of the akademi, inclusion of artists within the structure of the organization, and the urgent need for regular and critical appraisal of institutional structures (Bharadwaj, 2019, 67). Khosla Committee Report, 1972 points to the “failure of the National Akademies to accomplish their true objectives” on account of “incompetence, lack of imagination and ignorance of those in charge of the administration” (143). The report recommended reconstitution of the General Council and executive boards of the Akademies to mitigate imbalances of representation of professional artists, long term planning, continuous programming, and funding of credible individuals and institutions rather than ad hoc grants and enterprises, and, upgrading cultural infrastructure of state akademies (151-52). The P.N. Haksar Committee Report (1990), that examined the func-

tioning of the National Akademis and the National School of Drama was the most critical of them all. It foregrounded the increasing neglect of and apathy towards India's diverse cultures, and critiqued the administering of culture, and the division and propagation of majority over minority cultures in these institutions (1990, 27). Its critique of the over-centralisation and concentration of power is stated in no uncertain terms:

One wonders how a serious and meaningful discussion can take place amongst the members... There is a legitimate expectation that General Councils should be thinking bodies, searching bodies, and ought not to be reduced to rubber stamp organisations merely reflecting the federal nature of our polity (Sec. 3.20).

The Approach Paper to the National Policy on Culture (1992) takes stock of the arm's-length principle as the basis for the approach to culture, and emphasizes protecting minority cultures, promoting cultural diversity, and ensuring decentralisation and depoliticisation of cultural institutions. Both the Haksar Committee and the Approach Paper emphasise the dangers of state intervention and advocate as little intervention of the state in cultural production as possible. The Approach Paper never passed into law, remaining a draft paper available in the public domain; the critique and recommendations of the Haksar Committee have largely gone unaddressed, though not unnoticed in policy debates.

The question of cultural rights has also been a vexed one in the Indian context and a part of this derives from the ambiguity towards the understanding of culture itself. Article 43 of the

Indian constitution¹¹ that supplements the role of federal and regional governments, defines culture in terms of “leisure and quality of life” and recognises it as an important element of social citizenship practice (Paquette, 2019, 50). Ensuring the “full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities” puts the cultural rights of Indian people into perspective (Constitution of India, n.d.). It has been argued in existing policy literature that Articles 29 and 30 of the Indian Constitution that deal with the protection of *minority* cultures¹² provide the basis for cultural policy of India to a large extent (Rajyadhyaksha, et al., 2013, 64). But cultural rights do not fit well within the framework of fundamental rights or DPSP. Certain aspects of culture, especially those related to cultural practices of minority communities, protected and safeguarded under the constitution as fundamental rights, are seen not as cultural but as civil rights. Other important aspects of culture relating to increasing access to the cultural life of a community and its scientific advancement are also considered the responsibility of the state and therefore coupled with its economic and social rights. Unlike economic and social rights that are protected under national and regional frameworks, cultural rights are protected not at the national, but at the international level— within the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

¹¹ Article 43 of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs) requires the state to secure, “by suitable legislation or economic organisation or in any other way, to all workers, agricultural, industrial or otherwise, work, a living wage, conditions of work ensuring a decent standard of life and full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities” (Constitution of India, n.d.). The DPSPs are mentioned in Part IV of the Constitution and are meant to serve as guidance for government policy and represent the aspirational long-term goals of the state. Fundamental Rights, on the other hand, are mostly civil and political rights, like Right to Equality, Right to Religion and the more recently added Right to Education placed in Part III of the document..

¹² Minority culture, defined as a section of citizens with a distinct language, script, or culture, is sought to be protected under the Cultural and Educational Rights (CER) (Constitution of India, Article 29, 30), listed as part of the Fundamental Rights that states that it is the right of any section of citizens to conserve their culture, establish, and administer educational institutions (Constitution of India, Article 30). Effectively, CER protects the interest and rights of minorities and disallows the state from discriminating on religious or linguistic grounds in providing aid to educational institutions.

Existing Research and Theoretical Frames

While commentaries on the formation and trends of modern Indian theatre have engaged with the institutional archive of SNA and its interventions in theatre to offer insights on their impact on the aesthetics and politics of theatre, they only peripherally discuss the gaps between the rationale and rhetoric of these documents (Dalmia, 2004, 2008; Dharwadker, 2009; Bhatia. 2004, 2009). This scholarship has put forth a critique of state institutions' prescriptive role in culture, especially in models of institutionalized theatre practice. Studies have pointed towards a diverse and heterogeneous performance landscape and forwarded aspects of anti-colonial, decentralized, and people-centric approaches towards performance, largely arguing against the possibility of a coherent national policy on theatre and performance. The examination of policy documents, key interventions, and their implementation that has affected theatre practice, cultural infrastructure, and its governance in fundamental ways, remains mostly understudied in the context of theatre. Anita Cherian's doctoral dissertation titled 'Fashioning a National Theatre: Institutions and Cultural-policy in Post-Independence India' examines the development of the notion of national theatre, discussing the specific ways in which the post-colonial state deploys cultural policy and methods of institutionalization in the post-independence period to strengthen itself and maintain the hegemony of a ruling elite (Unpublished, 2005). Through archival research of state institutions, including SNA and assessment of the role of international organisations like UNESCO, the work traces the changes in policies, and the official understanding of culture vis-a-vis the radical/democratic potential of theatre. This work remains the only doctoral level research in the field and some of its findings and key arguments, published in the form of journal articles, have informed the present study. Social scientist Veena Naregal's research on cultural and political his-

tory of western India, particularly the history of Marathi theatre and new performative forms like *Sangeet Natak* in the late nineteenth century demonstrates how middle class and upper caste regional intellectuals negotiated a “critical advantage” over performance forms- manoeuvring their past to either purify and appropriate them as classical (like in the case of *Bharatnatyam* and *Kathak*) or downgrade regional forms to craft a distinctly moral middle class identity (2008, 35). The shifts in the contexts of performance and structures of patronage of pre-existing performative forms like the *Laavani* and the *Kirtan* brought about in the early twentieth century eventually led to their classification, legitimization, appropriation/neglect by regional elites. Many other theatre scholars whose work explores modern and contemporary theatre practices and their structural and performative lineage discuss questions of state policy and patronage as part of the history of modern theatre in India. Vasudha Dalmia discusses and critically analyses the category of Folk theatre, the trends towards utilising its resources in modern theatre practice and the state efforts in this direction to create a national theatre movement (2008 and 2012). While researching the complex histories and traditions from which modern theatre forms have emerged, she remains attentive to the larger socio-political contexts that inform these institutional actions and weaves in the strategies of playwriting and directing that the SNA interventions ushered in. Nandi Bhatia’s detailed examination of the colonial archive of theatre is informed by the interest in exploring the role of indigenous theatre idioms in resisting British rule and in developing a national consciousness in India (2004). She culls out from historical documents, governmental acts and policies, particularly the Censorship Act of 1876 and the *Neel Darpan* Controversy, unexplored issues and uses them to offer a detailed reportage on vernacular theatre, the Shakespearean and the IPTA theatre. She conceptualises these models of theatre practice as performance-

based ‘acts of resistance’ to nineteenth and twentieth century colonial oppression. In the anthology *Modern Indian theatre: A Reader* (2009), Bhatia puts together essays that provide a contextual history and open up the variety and complexity of modern theatre in India. The essays by Rakesh Solomon and Aparna Dharwadker have been particularly valuable to the discussion on historiography, modernity, and the challenges to writing comprehensive theatre histories in the Indian context. Brahma Prakash’s *Cultural Labour: Conceptualising ‘Folk Performance’ in India* (2019) argues for the unattended project of creating a historiography of folk performances and links it to the formation of an elitist aesthetic canon in the post-independence period. Aparna Dharwadker’s book *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory and Urban Performance in India since 1947* (2005) foregrounds questions of nationalism and nation-state formation through theatre by using an exhaustive list of published play texts and performance data to narrate themes, styles, and genres that constitute the post-independence canon in theatre and the role of state institutions in its creation. She discusses the debates peddled at SNA’s Drama Seminar, 1956 and the “Nehru Shatabdi Samaroh”, 1989 to foreground state and institutional imperatives through questions of patronage, schemes of financial support, and theatre festivals—all of which circle attention back to the functioning of SNA. Each of these studies illuminates the current thesis by offering methodological and analytical frames for understanding the intersections of policy and nation-state in the absence of a written policy document. Essays by the theatre scholar and practitioner, Anuradha Kapur, have significantly informed the discussions on tradition, modernity, and authenticity in theatre and have allowed for a critical reading of these notions and shaped the thinking on theatre and politics of culture. Of particular significance to the field at large and this research in particular, are the writings of Rustom Bharucha whose commentaries on the arts cul-

tural discourse in independent India analyse the contradiction and confusion of interpretations of Indian culture that fall upon and get subsumed under “predetermined and homogenised categories and premises” (1992, 1668). His articles have critically analysed the state impulses like the theatre of roots, discourse on folk and classical theatre and his detailed analysis of the Haksar Committee Report remains a significant contribution to discussions on cultural policy and its implementation by state institutions in India (1991). Several other scholarly works have informed the reading and understanding of theatre culture in India, both in colonial and post-colonial contexts—Sharmishtha Saha (2018), Kathryn Hansen (1991), Ralph Yarrow (2001), Richmond, Farley, Swann L. Darius and Zarrilli (1993) Shanta Gokhale (2000), Mulk Raj Anand (2016). While this study aligns with and builds upon the research of the links between state and theatre offered in these existing scholarly works, it proceeds from the recognition that no dedicated work on the cultural policy mapping of the colonial and post-colonial period exists in theatre scholarship. While SNA has been the focus of attention for many of these commentaries, there does not exist a detailed account of its structure and activities during its foundational years that have continued to inform theatre policy, discourse, and practice in India.

Relevance of the Study:

If the building blocks of cultural policy research can be understood as engaging with the analytical formulation of the question of culture, and the regulatory, delivery, and coordination capacities of institutions that administer it, then clearly the field has remained somewhat ignored by both performing art practitioners and scholars—even within the social sciences and the newer inter-disciplinary fields such as performance studies in India. The proof of this lies in the dearth

of scholarly analysis and critical engagement with cultural institutions and the absence of cultural policy study/research as a field from higher education in the form of any dedicated centre or department. This study aims to fill the gap in existing scholarship on cultural policy in India by articulating crucial effects of sustained involvement of the state in the field of theatre, both intended and unintended, analyzing gaps in its intentions and the implementation of specific legislative, legal, and administrative actions, their claims and deliverables.

Methodology

This study develops from the methodological challenge of the absence of a well articulated cultural policy statement/document in India. Despite a network of institutions—Planning Commission documents, schemes, initiatives, and budgetary allocations of SNA towards promotion, preservation, and patronage to specific theatre forms and performance etc.—there exists no stated coherent policy framework in the realm of culture. The attempt to aggregate a policy narrative from what appears to be a *de facto* policy is meant to clarify the elements of governmental action and regulation that may be programmatic as well as those that may not be desirable or practical anymore. In the process, I critically analyse the discourse of theatre from the colonial to the foundational years of post-independence India. In the context of my study, ‘discourse’ refers to the overarching framework of language, theoretical assumptions, and values within which institutional, professional, regional, and national identities are developed. This meant keeping an eye out for the ways in which discourse materializes: precisely through invented categories, metaphors, historical interpellations, shared or common knowledge, and assumed understandings of policies, histories, viewpoints and ideologies.

The current study adopts a mixed methodology that considers the parameters of qualitative assessment—the operational structures of policy—and the analytical, reflective aspects that the state apparatus of legal, political, and ideological conditions provides for theatre practice and discourse in post-colonial India. To do this, it was imperative to identify, analyse, and critically engage with the official and institutional perspectives gathered from the data collected during archival research. This includes the concerned institution’s historical aims and objectives laid in its annual bulletins; the schemes and programmes and their stated rationales; annual review reports that reflect on institutional performance; its schemes and initiatives, debates and discussions from seminars, conferences, and other significant events that capture the state of theatre in the country and offer approaches for state intervention. A narrative of unwritten and implicit policy is derived from analysing the intentions and claims in these documents, the institutional structures that determine policy-making, and the outcomes they produce. But as Derrida reminds us, the archives “produce as much as they record” (Derrida, 1995, 17). Many quality-driven parameters emerged from archival research pointing towards the interface between politics, power, hegemonic frameworks, and their demonstrations in cultural policy making. The study engages this qualitative data to integrate the complex workings of state policy actions with conceptual ideas. In certain contexts, quantitative data (annual allocation to culture, changes in plan and non-plan activities, annual budgets, and expenditure patterns during the period) played a crucial role in examining and asserting the positions laid out in the documents and provided valuable evidential markers to identify patterns of institutional activity and preference.

This study has been structured in five core chapters and a conclusion. Each of these is briefly described below.

Chapter one discusses the narratives, assumptions, and hierarchies of nineteenth and twentieth century theatre histories. It argues that the early historiographical inclusions and exclusions of theatre practice and the system within which it functions, have continued to govern modern policy discourses in post-colonial India. I contextualise colonial and nationalist theatre historiographies within the frameworks of orientalism, nation, and nationalism that govern the key operations of eighteenth and nineteenth century theatre, i.e., knowledge-production in the form of theatre historiography, and theatre and cultural production itself. I reflect on the state of patronage and support for pre-existing (pre-colonial) forms of theatre in British India and examine the adverse impact of the emergent modern theatre on native performance traditions and the larger theatrical landscape of the late nineteenth century. Chapter two discusses the political and cultural context of the late colonial state by elaborating on its forms of governance, notions of culture, and its self-understanding in relation to the native context. I examine policies enacted in the interconnected and analogous fields of education, press, and theatre between 1835-1878, the domains that constituted the nineteenth century urban public culture. These domains that Partha Chatterjee calls the “inner domain of national life”, became the cultural modalities through which the project of Orientalism was carried out (1993, 6-10). The colonial state created a progressively repressive legal and administrative state apparatus to negotiate with increasingly self-conscious and nationalist native cultural expressions. I argue that even though the explicit policy on dramatic activity, the Dramatic Performances Act was enacted in 1876, the theoretical and ideological premise of a colonial cultural policy, its administrative claims and interventions had already been instituted in other areas of public culture, impacting theatre and performance practice implicitly. The third chapter opens a discussion on the varied generative contexts for the

formation of Sangeet Natak Akademi, the key performing arts institution (established in 1953, Delhi) as the most prominent mediation in theatre and performance in post-colonial India. The chapter discusses the Akademi's institutional structure, its roles and functions, and the significant interventions it made in the first decade of its existence, from 1953-1960. The Planning Commission's Five-Year Plans from this period are analysed to ascertain the role of culture and arts, and the differences in their definitions and composition in the context of a newly independent state. The discussion engages the imperatives to construct a unique and unitary national identity through the arts that preoccupied the state and foregrounds its key programmatic interventions in theatre. Away from their role as sources of livelihood and pleasure, theatre and performance are thereby constructed as a site of aesthetic and moral reform. Chapter four critically examines the Drama Seminar Report (DS report, 1956), the first document that offers the terms on which an implicit policy framework for theatre would be created. The zeitgeist that animates these discussions is the newly emergent nation that necessitates an authentic national (theatre) culture. It offers several complex perspectives on the historical, administrative, infrastructural, and aesthetic aspects of theatre/ performance practice in India. The chapter analyses the polyphony of voices and opinions on key issues and discusses the discourse it generates—classifications of 'folk' and 'classical' traditions, importance of *Natyashastra* in reconciling them with the 'modern', notions of 'authenticity', 'modernity', 'national theatre', and cultural infrastructure. The institutional conditions that regulate the field of theatre today can be traced back to the gaps between the concerns expressed in the Drama Seminar, the policy recommendations at the end, and their implementation. Key recommendations are studied for their cultural and political efficacy and examined against the practice of policy, i.e., the negotiation of an unwritten policy and its arbitrary

and incomplete implementation. The final chapter considers the period between 1961-1985 to analyse the concerted and continued discursive, financial and ideological investments of SNA in inventing a tradition-centred performance style. In the first part of the chapter, I locate in the discourses of twentieth century theatre historiography, aesthetic practices of the IPTA, the regional articulations of indigenous forms and local traditions and the historical antecedents of the approach to tradition that the roots movement draws its ideology and aesthetics from. I draw upon the proceedings of the SNA's Roundtable on the Contemporary Relevance of Traditional Theatre (1971) to discuss the significance of tradition in modern theatre and analyse the significant interventions that were made to integrate the two. Opening up the debates on tradition, folk, and popular theatre by considering them as keywords, I unpack how their meanings evolved contextually overtime and in relation to the uses and purposes to which they have been put in theatre in India. The final section of the chapter critically analyses the 'Theatre of Roots' movement that idealised an institutionally evolved format of production and celebrated the urban practitioner's return to tradition as an undoing of the effects of colonialism. I analyse these developments within the larger context of the economic and foreign policy mandates of the 1980s that mobilised traditional culture to assert cultural sovereignty in the international sphere. The conclusion extrapolates key insights into the complex and contradictory positions and actions of an unstated institutional policy from the discussions and findings of this study. It directs attention towards select issues that can help bridge the gap between policy-making and its implementation in theatre.

Chapter 1

History and Historiography of Indian Theatre: Grounds for Actions of Policy, Patronage, and State Intervention

The question of cultural policy has only been studied tangentially in narratives of anti-colonial political theatre, colonial censorship, and the state's response to progressive cultural movements. Even though the analysis of post-independence state institutions, like SNA, finds mention in scholarship that reviews modern Indian theatre, there has been no sustained engagement with the historical constitution of theatre as a field and subject of policy-making. The fields of theatre history and historiography have remained disconnected from the policy narratives of colonial and postcolonial times. As a result, historical accounts of theatre practice, documented regional histories, and the historical linkages between theatre and the state find no articulation in policy documents. The absence of dedicated study of national policy in theatre has also meant that there has been no concerted reflection on the state of patronage and support that pre-colonial theatre enjoyed. The state of theatre and the structures of policy and policing that the modern nation state inherited are crucial to any study of postcolonial policy in the field of theatre. Theatre historiography plays a central role in providing not only a record of the state of theatre, its aesthetic conventions, and the political, administrative and ideological contexts of the emergence of theatrical forms, but also actively creates narratives, assumptions, and hierarchies between theatrical practices that continue to govern modern policy discourses. It provides a sense of the deep structures that inform our understanding of cultural policy and of theatre itself. This chapter attempts to sketch out the critical issues involved in historiography itself, the forces that have

shaped it, and how it impacted theatre and its relationship with the state. I contextualise theatre historiography as an ideologically embedded epistemological exercise first used within the colonial context to gain information and knowledge of the other, albeit in seriously limited ways. The inclusions and exclusions of colonial theatre history and its temporally-ordered textual embodiments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries help in understanding the historical linkages between knowledge and colonial power. The nationalist response to colonial dominance of Indian theatre and its historiographic accounts have attempted to dislodge the Orientalist preoccupation with the past by including the theatrical present into history writing. But equally, the bourgeois nationalist claims of theatrical modernity have resulted in a disproportionate focus on modern theatre located primarily in urban centres, largely excluding pre-colonial folk and traditional performance genres. In this sense, the blindspot of colonial and nationalist historiographies have been an indirect consequence of political and cultural actions of the colonial state. This chapter first discusses the challenges posed by existing theatre historiographies—orientalist, nationalist, and then postcolonial -- and points to their exclusions. Thereafter they are examined for the consequences that have accrued for post-colonial national policy-making.

The purpose of a historiographical account of theatre is not to recount a comprehensive theatre history or to create a narrative of the ‘national’ cultural policy enacted in colonial and postcolonial Indian theatre. Given a multilingual and multifaceted theatrical culture spanning over two millennia, such an exercise would only be a reductive account of the diverse and complex negotiations between pre-existing systems of power and patronage, the enactments of colonial state, and the resulting political and cultural currents that impacted performance culture. It would also assume a cultural and political uniformity in a regionally and linguistically diverse

theatrical context in the two hundred-year long colonial period and lead us to conclude that the relationship between the colonial state and native culture developed uniformly across traditions and genres, regions and languages, irrespective of the uneven spread of the empire and its cultural and political infrastructure. Instead, this chapter critically reviews existing theatre historiography to foreground its ideological values and exclusions that have informed the content and discourse of modern theatrical culture. By doing so, I hope to provide the context in which a national cultural identity was constructed.

The chapter is divided into four sections: in the first section, the underlining frameworks of Orientalism, nation, and nationalism that govern the eighteenth and nineteenth century knowledge-production and history writing are discussed. In the second section, the ideological and methodological issues that Indian theatre historiography suffers from given the colonial and nationalist contexts of its emergence are narrated. The lack of historical periodisation, the nature of evidence and ignorance towards non-written, oral, embodied, and linear forms of theatre are issues that have concerned modern theatre historians. Here, the theoretical insights developed by subaltern historians who have critiqued any equivalence between the Western construction of 'history' and the indigenous notion of '*itihas*' that is embedded in the *Puranas* and epic texts like *Mahabharata* and *Ramanaya* are borrowed. In the third section, the state of specific language theatres, focussing on the question of state patronage and support in pre-colonial and colonial times, is explained. As older forms of patronage altered due to colonisation, continued militaristic opposition to the British, and the eventual collapse of the smaller kingdoms and local monarchies, the existing rural, agricultural, and ritualistic performances underwent transformation. The phenomenon of modern urban theatre from the mid-nineteenth century in the colonial capital of

Calcutta and other urban centres is discussed in the fourth section. I discuss the broad trajectory of modern theatre that was modelled on and heavily borrowed from the new European model of theatre, while also incorporating select conventions of the pre-existing ritual and religious performance styles. I briefly narrate the histories of theatre in the cities of Bombay, Calcutta, and Gujarat, the emerging theatre in the Hindi-speaking northern region as well as the southern region of the Madras Presidency. In each of these locations, I map the impact of modern theatre on the theatrical landscape of the late nineteenth century and on indigenous forms of theatre. Finally, I return to theatre historiography and its exclusion of pre-modern forms of theatre, to ascertain and reiterate the crucial inclusions and exclusions that historiography has performed, thereby impacting colonial and postcolonial policy discourses.

Conceptual Framework: Colonialism, Nationalism and National Culture

In his study ‘On National Culture’, Franz Fanon argues that colonialism is a force that seeks to impinge not only upon the present and future of a people, but also on their past and modes of retelling their history. He argues that,

colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance... (1963, 148-49)

It is precisely against these processes that devalue and de-legitimise pre-colonial history and historiography that claims to a “national culture” are constructed by the native intellectual, thereby

rehabilitating the nation (Fanon, 1967, 211-12). Benedict Anderson in his influential study on nationalism, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) argues that nations are not determinate, natural products of given sociological conditions such as language, or race or religion, but rather had been, in Europe as in the rest of the world, 'imagined' into existence. He discusses print culture in all its forms, particularly the newspaper and the novel, as important institutional forms through which this imagined community came to acquire concrete shape, creating the cultural conditions needed for the idea of nation to become the political norm. Partha Chatterjee objects to the homogenization of all nationalisms in Anderson's analysis, which limits the imagination of nation-ness in colonies like India. He posits that,

History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anti-colonial resistance and postcolonial misery (1993, 5)

Postcolonial scholars like Partha Chatterjee characterise the project of nation-making in erstwhile colonies like India as a complex and contradictory phenomenon, marked by anxieties of imitativeness and the apprehension that Indian nationalism is just a poor copy or derivation of European post-enlightenment discourse (13). For Chatterjee, the distinctness of Indian nationalism lies in its 'fault lines' that are visible at the very moment of its conception, in its desire to counter the colonial claim that the non-Western world was fundamentally incapable of self-rule in the challenging conditions of the modern world (6). But insofar as Indian nationalism prepared to embark on a project of indigenous self modernisation, it produced,

a discourse in which, even as it challenged the colonial claim to political domination, it also accepted the very intellectual premises of ‘modernity’ on which colonial domination was based (Chatterjee, 1986, 30)

Nationalism in the Indian context is not to be seen only as a political movement or a historical narrative that is limited to the struggle for political power. In Chatterjee’s expanded view, the history of nationalism must also include those historical processes whereby colonised societies defined themselves as a civilisational entity marking the limits of what constitutes their unique national identity. In order to do this, they determine what aspects of their past and present identity must be preserved and protected against colonial infiltration and change, and what may be those aspects of their national life that must undergo modern reform that the colonial encounter brought about. In doing so, nationalism creates a difference between the ‘culture’ of the coloniser and the colonised, thereby, asserting its native sovereignty, distinct from the domain of politics where it sought to erase all difference and claim equanimity with the coloniser. This inner or spiritual realm of cultural life of the colonised peoples, that included language, religion, aspects of personal and family life, especially the conduct of women, was to be preserved as pure and authentically Indian, marking an essential difference from the outer/ material realm of national life that was the strict domain of state, law, and administration. These two domains are not to be seen only as acting in opposition to each other, each defining the limits of the other but should also be studied for their role in shaping each other and affecting symbolic and material changes to cultural forms. Nationalism, in colonial and postcolonial nations, joins the cultural and the political in deeply interconnected ways. The creation of a modern theatrical culture that is national and yet not Western is a product of this historical and ideological process that forms the contex-

tual basis for a Western-style Indian theatre in colonial India in the second half of the nineteenth century. The use of modern forms of colonial power and governance in the form of policies that surveilled, regulated, and censored theatre is parallel to the aesthetic innovations made to the nineteenth century urban theatre. Traditional, folk, and increasingly the modern urban theatre, thus, came to constitute the inner/spiritual realm of national life that was continuously distinguished from its colonial counterpart using complex and often ambiguous ways. This happened even as the colonial regime implemented policies that forced them out of their specific linguistic, performative, and spatial domains and brought them into its administrative fold. In the post-independence period, theatre and performance came to be more firmly designated as part of the inner domain through which it achieved the ideological project of creating and institutionalising a modern aesthetic form. This difference between the inner, spiritual, and the outer, material domains of national life, Chatterjee claims, has continued into the postcolonial society where, “consolidation of the power of the nation state has meant the marking of a new set of differences” (1993, 26). The processes of indigenisation, modernisation, and de-colonisation of culture undertaken by SNA, the institution whose policies form the focus of this study, have to be seen in this context. The strict boundaries between tradition and modernity, urban and rural, national and regional, that have defined the discourse of Indian theatre, are to be seen as efforts to consolidate power and assert the centrality of the nation-state through marking differences and creating categories.

In this chapter, I extend this understanding to revisit the historical transformations in theatre practice and discourse that were produced and acted upon by the hegemonic project of nationalist modernity. I unpack those discursive conditions that remained suppressed and unattend-

ed in policy discourse of the modern regime of power that the independent nation-state came to represent. These discourses forward a critique to the ideological use of culture in the normalising project of nationalism and the indigenisation of Indian culture that mark the continuities between the colonial and the national state.

Historiography and Its Discontents

The field of theatre history and historiography is a complex and contested terrain due the indeterminacy and lack of foundational basis for the defining concepts of history, historical record and evidence, myth, and narrative. Nineteenth century Orientalist historians used the lack of rational documented facts as a basis to deny the existence of history and therefore experience or any legible forms that carry that experience. Existing scholarship on Indian theatre historiography unpacks the Orientalist agendas embedded in the early historiographical endeavours and demonstrates how theatre historiography has itself been determined by the political and cultural history of its times. The birth of the Orientalist discipline of Indology in the mid-eighteenth century was part of the historical context that produced the earliest modern histories of theatre. The process of learning Sanskrit and Persian and publishing texts, dictionaries, and commentaries gained momentum and led to the founding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal by Sir William Jones in 1784, institutionalising the European claim over Orientalist knowledge. At the centre of these processes of standardisation and institutionalisation was the privileging of Sanskrit texts and the social structures that nominated the Brahmin as the knowledgeable one. Jones' English translation of Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* (titled *Sacontala; or, The Fatal Ring: An Indian Drama*) was published in 1789 and followed by the discovery of Sanskrit language and dramatic literature for the Western reader including other Sanskrit plays. In the 'Preface' to the translation,

Jones ascribes to Kalidasa, an unparalleled cultural iconicity calling him “the Shakespeare of India” and the play as the most “pleasing and *authentick* picture of old Hindu manners, and one of the greatest curiosities that the literature of Asia has yet brought to light” (1807, 367). He connects the act of translating *Shakuntala* to the “administration of justice to the Hindus” and even though there are no definite details of its creation or performance, Jones constructs an imagined national past of the Hindus based on *Shakuntala* (365). William Jones’ translations and other such literary works of late eighteenth century Indologists constitute the first historiographical attempts that linked the mythic origins of Indian theatre to a long history of dramatic practice. Additionally, they equate Sanskrit to the refinement of other classical European languages like Latin and Greek, and Sanskrit *natak* to the Western play. What followed were H.H. Wilson’s two-volume *Select Specimens of the Theatre of the Hindus* in 1827 and 1835 containing the ‘Treatise on the Dramatic System of the Hindus’ and translations of six major Sanskrit plays and excerpts from twenty-three others, and Elphinstone’s *History of India* (1841). The work of nineteenth century Indologists like Sylvain Levi, Ernest Philip, and A.B. Keith designated drama as the highest form of literary text and a genre that attracted both the philosopher as well as the philologist. Sanskrit theatre histories by these European scholars bear out their privilege to discover and draw out from native literature useful historical information despite the lack of historically sound and reliable materials. Edward Said, in his study on Orientalism defines the Orient as the exotic, the ‘other’, and an ideological tool which the coloniser exploits for the sake of asserting their cultural superiority. India was seen as Europe’s ‘Other’, an entity that was possible to be known by the “detached and distanced” European observer (Prakash, 1990, 386). These English language histories that were made accessible to the modern urban literati succeed in constructing

an incomplete, exotic, and unchanging view of Indian culture. Ancient literature became classical literature, Sanskrit drama came to stand in for Indian theatre, and its history conflated with the history of all theatre in India. Indian scholars followed suit—Sourindra Mohan Thakur's *Bharatiya Natya Rahasya* or *A Treatise on Hindu Theatre* published in 1878 problematically equates 'Bharatiya/Indian' in the Bengali title with 'Hindu', attempts to rewrite the mythic origins of Sanskrit theatre as a legitimate history, and forges a connection between the Sanskritic aesthetic theory and contemporary Bengali theatre. Chandra Bhan Gupta's *The Indian Theatre* (1954), written much later, also makes Sanskrit theatre synonymous with Indian theatre. The goal and lingering legacy of this scholarship was to champion the ancient and obsolete Sanskrit drama and theatre as the epitome of Indian literature and culture, begetting the literary and cultural biases that were etched in Orientalist ideology.

Sheldon Pollock reminds us of the differentiated spheres of Indian historicity and historical change on the one hand and how the Indian past appears in Sanskrit literary culture on the other. He posits a central problematic of the historiography of Sanskritic dramatic tradition and its a-historicity. "However scholars might wish to periodise Sanskrit literary culture, it is crucial to bear in mind such local procedures, by which, as part of its fundamental self-understanding, the culture sought to resist all periodisation" (Pollock, 2003, 80). The absence of reliable historical periodisation of the Sanskrit theatrical tradition is only compounded by the limited Western view of literary culture as only that which is written and of theatre as that which has a record in the textual form and carries a literary reference. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's study of African culture and the notion of 'orature' captures the complexity of cultural expression in non-Western, pre-literary societies and can be extended usefully in the Indian context (1986). He argues that tradi-

tional and oral cultures preserve their past through oral and performative means, referring to the arts communicated and received orally and the wider performance based systems of knowledge that embody the culture of a people (115-19).

Despite the ideological categorisations of the classical, folk, and modern theatre and veneration of the Sanskrit theatre over all else, theatre historiography in India suffers from lack of reliable historical evidence that can contextualise theatre in its performed historical contexts marking its conventions, authors, texts, and productions. This has happened despite the fact that,

throughout the active period of Sanskrit drama (from the third to the twelfth centuries) playwrights complimented their precursors, invoked earlier plays within the action of their own work, manipulated the audience's familiarity with the dramatic canon, and occasionally created a meta-theatrical play-with-the-play structure to highlight the nature of drama as a convention-bound performance art (Dharwadker, 2010, 173)

Even where a detailed compendium of the theatrical activity of the past does exist, like in the case of the *Natyashastra* that captures every practical and conceptual aspect of theatre, there are “[but] no dates or chronology, no trajectory of the development of the art and craft of theatre, and no verifiable names of playwrights, company leaders, producers, or actors” (Solomon qtd. In Dharwadker, 173). While Sanskrit dramatic tradition, its play texts and the taxonomy of the theatrical genres prescribed in the *Natyashastra* were considered absolute and the former assigned the classical status, all other non-Sanskrit genres of vernacular theatre—traditional, popular, and folk forms were excluded from Orientalist theatre historiography. Non-literary traditions of theatre and performance were passed on through oral transmission and therefore performed,

circulated, and witnessed only within limited cultural and social contexts. While folklorists considered oral and folk forms important only for their historic value arguing for their documentation and preservation, colonial administrators used folklore as knowledge about the natives' present, considering it important to rule them better. The preference of the native past over its present has been a double-edged weapon that sustains unequal power relations over knowledge and has been a lingering legacy of colonialism. On the one hand, it privileges the native cultural past to dislodge claims of change and progress in the present, anyway inseparable from relations of colonialism; on the other it denies a rational history and a historical consciousness to the natives by foregrounding the lack of historical evidence, literary logic, chronology, and causality thereby assigning to itself the ameliorative task of piecing together a scattered and irrational lineage through Western approaches to time, logic, history, and research. This aggrandising of Sanskrit drama and theatre over those created in all other Indian languages not only effaced the diverse literary, linguistic, and performance traditions of Indian theatre, but also, as Rakesh Solomon contends, failed to convey "the full multilingual essence of Sanskrit theatre and culture that they obviously wished to champion" (2009, 14).

In contrast to the Orientalist history of theatre that limits itself to Sanskrit theatre, nationalist historiography attempts to record a comprehensive history of 'Indian theatre' that begins from the classical Sanskrit theatre and reaches right upto the present. What characterises this project is the attempt at recuperating precisely those post-classical, premodern, and modern histories of "vernacular" theatre that the European Orientalists had erased. The absence of historical and historiographical account of Indian performance practice has also been ascribed to the fundamental and intrinsic difference in the Western and indigenous notions of time and history un-

der conditions of colonialism (Dharwadker, 2010, 168-172). For these historians, the notion of history translates as *itihas*, a term often used to understand Indian history and historiography as distinct from the West. In its broad sense, it refers not to an objective historical fact, but rather, to the subjective, interpretive and embodied experience of events of the past. But as Ranajit Guha argues, the exposition of 'history' as *itihasa* has been a nationalist construct of a small but dominant Hindu conservative intelligentsia to prove that "India, too, had a historiography of the world-historical kind as old as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, and the West had at last come to acknowledge this as a fact" (2002, 51-2). *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, routinely referred to as *itihas* in a literary-poetic sense, have been sufficiently democratised and embodied in diverse oral and performed cultures. While they might contain some information about the past they cannot be considered synonymous with history. Studies of Indian theatre beginning from the 1930s authored by, R.K. Yajnik (1933), Chandra Bhan Gupta (1991), Varadpande, M.L. (1992) H.N. Dasgupta (2009) etc. have been invested in creating a linear, unbroken history of dramatic activity. The cultural nationalist's claims of a long history of national theatre, made modern theatre synonymous with Indian theatre. While Sanskrit theatre and realistic Western theatre were, to varying degrees, accepted sources of this new modern theatre, folk and traditional genres were completely rejected. The role of elite theatre historians in writing theatre practices and traditions 'in' and 'out' of the history of theatre has had a significant impact on post-colonial state policy on these forms. Later postcolonial histories do account for the traditional even if in limited detail but are the first set of writings that attest to the diversity of the traditional theatre repertoire. Amongst these Nemi Chandra Jain (1992), Farley P. Richmond et al (1993), Phillip Zarrilli (2000, 2003), Som Benegal (1967), Balwant Gargi (1991) and Adya Rangacharya's (1980) writ-

ings are most prominent. They presage the fascination with folk and traditional theatre forms that the institutionalised urban theatre participated in from the 1960s to the 1980s under the aegis of the SNA.

Contemporary theatre historians point to the problematics of both Orientalist historiography (through its single-minded valorisation of the Sanskrit tradition) as well as the version carried out by the cultural nationalists from 1940s onwards (by way of its emphasis on *Natyashastra* and modern theatre). Solomon points to how exclusion of traditional forms pre-existing the modern urban theatre from the echelons of recorded theatre history affected their exclusion from cultural consciousness (2009, 11-13). Prejudice against indigenous, popular, non-literary performance genres often practiced in rural India affected a devaluation of traditional theatre forms and their systematic erasure from theatre history and critical spaces of analysis. Dharwadker (2010, 170) notes that a series of binaries are supported through this Western Orientalist thinking, viz. historical/ahistorical, scientific/mythic, modern/traditional, dynamic/static, and political/apolitical that find their way into the modern state's discourse on theatre, the formation of national institutions like SNA, and their relationship to folk forms of theatre and dance. The blindspots and exclusions performed by colonial and nationalist historiographies of theatre are evident in their persistent emphasis on urban theatre, classical dance, and music. Theatre scholarship has focussed on the emergence of modern theatre filtered through notions of "national identity", "colonial mimicry", and "ambivalence" as well as strategies of decolonisation, albeit disproportionately in comparison to rural folk and subaltern performances. While modern Indian and colonial theatre gets much greater scholarly attention, what remains excluded from historiographical accounts are the community-based performance traditions that pre-existed colonial theatre. What

happened to theatre and cultural practices that did not fit into the definitions of theatre in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has remained only a matter of conjecture. While there are several methodological and empirical issues in historicising theatre itself, the popular and folk traditions of performance have additionally suffered from ideological exclusions. Colonial and nationalist historiography conveniently assume that the history of marginalisation of folk forms began with colonial intervention. But in a caste-based feudal and hierarchical society, the denigration of cultural practices of the lower caste and classes of people had always been the case. Increasing division of labour based on the formation of social and economic classes had already created aesthetic standards and tastes determined by caste-specific notions of beauty, disgust, purity etc. The practical ignorance towards theatre and performance traditions that accrue and sustain in the embodied, oral, and lineal forms led to their complete erasure from historiography.

Folk and community-based theatre practices in India have always existed at the intersection of public entertainment, religious festivity, and ritual performances with roots in local legends, rituals, and oral histories. In their various manifestations—as popular and regional folk theatres like *Jatra*, *Tamasha*, *Nautanki*, *Burra-katha*, as religious-mythological drama like *Ramlila*, and as forms of puppet theatre—they have always been an important part of cultural life in India from pre-colonial times. Community-based performance, considered pre-modern from the dominant historiographical perspective, could well be regarded as a potential arena of and participant in what Habermas terms the ‘public sphere’, a space for speakers and addressees, which fosters debate, interest, and attendance (2008, 12). The public sphere’s improvisatory and often subversive character lends the popular, oral, and performative genres a recognisability, affective quality, and vitality which is quite distinct from the written literary forms of expression.

The history of theatrical censorship enforced first by the colonial government attests to the transgressive potentials of theatre. Due to colonial interventions, the marginalisation of rural, folk, and community-based cultural practices, much of which was performance based, was complete. Colonial and nationalist historiography have distanced themselves from the experiences of the subaltern classes, excluding those sites of performance practice where colonialism could not make deep inroads and thus had no impact, neither becoming modern nor resistant.

Systems of Patronage: From Pre-Colonial to the Colonial State

To excavate historical structures of support and patronage of the arts requires attention to the underlying cultural, economic, and political systems of the time that provide the context and rationale for the existence of arts. The framework of the colonial state and the orientalist logic of knowledge and cultural production are significant to this analysis. Both imperial and nationalist historiographies claim both continuities and discontinuities between colonial and pre-existing political systems and revisionist historians of Indian colonialism argue that the early colonial state was not radically different from existing indigenous regimes of power. But the underlining of continuities between pre-colonial systems of power and the colonial state works at legitimising colonialism and undermining its long-lasting cultural and political repercussions.

The history of colonial, social, and cultural engineering marks, in no simplistic way, only the most multifaceted and unequal continuities, partial shifts, and radical breaks from the existing social and cultural patterns of life in the colony. Partha Chatterjee demonstrates how the colonial state marks a distinct departure from indigenous pre-colonial history, attributing it to the “external extractive force” of colonialism (1993, 31). The specific conditions of capitalism in colonial India and the exploitative relations between capital and labour it generated sheltered and

benefited only the propertied classes, both European and Indian. He reminds us that the economic actions of the capitalist colonial enterprise destroyed petty manufacturers, created a mass of over-exploited peasantry, and further demolished the already decrepit community institutions, making the transition from capitalism to industrialism an impossibility (ibid). The impact of the colonial regime in the economic sphere was mirrored in the cultural domain in the forms of 'traditionalization' of the Indian society, i.e., a rigid codification of customs and tradition at the cost of local community practices producing a caricature of 'traditional India'. Theatre and performance became prime sites for assertions of an Indian identity based on contestations of classicism, tradition, and modernity.

Unlike the impact of modern print culture that did not destroy existing traditional literary forms due to the absence of any identifiable antecedent, in performing arts, there did exist several prominent traditions. And so did systems of patronage consistent with the pre-colonial political forms of power. A political system based on royal primordial loyalties had been the historical condition for a culture of patronage. The dominance of landlords and absentee landlords in the sphere of arts and aesthetics is partly attributable to their being a leisure class of a kind (Erdman, 1992, 12-13). The contexts of their emergence and practice had so far been religious, ritualistic, and communitarian. Moreover, most art forms and classical traditions had been rooted in and limited within the boundaries of specific linguistic regions. Travel of these forms beyond their social and cultural contexts was not common, making them part of the economy of "localised commodity production" that retains its distinction and purity through resisting emigration (Deshpande, 1987, 2175). The new socio-economic order that colonialism sought to affect brought about distinct changes to these existing forms and the patterns of patronage for arts, music, and

theatre. In Maharashtra, the loss of political power of the local elites led them to assert their identity through patronage leading to the flourishing of classical music that was increasingly imbibing elements of Hindustani classical music from the North due to the newly found possibilities of travel. In South India, where the British took much longer to consolidate political control, a rich and continued tradition of classical music developed and was sustained by the local patrons. These local lordships, their powerful hold over the populace, and dominance of existing political power was a reality, even though increasingly difficult to sustain given the economic vigour and development of the eighteenth century. In the section below, I map theatre history to understand feudal forms of patronage extended to Sanskrit theatre and popular folk performance genres. The decline of Sanskrit theatre along with an increased vernacularisation of theatre also resulted in a change in forms of financial support, exacerbated with the onslaught of European political and economic interventions inaugurated by colonialism.

Pre-colonial Patronage and Practice of Sanskrit drama

Historically, Sanskrit drama thrived under the patronage of ruling princes and royal palaces with many poets like Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, and Rajasekhara being engaged as court poets. Kings like Sudraka and Sri Harsha were themselves poets and dramatists of renown. Royal patronage and contact with political rulers had historically played an important part in shaping the form and pattern of Sanskrit drama. Forms of ritualistic performance like *Kathakali*, associated specifically with the temple, had always been composite forms including music, dance, and rhythm, often sponsored by the aristocracy. Romila Thapar reminds us that temple and architectural monuments were both places of worship and a “source of legitimation” for the king or those who were in political authority, leading to every dynastic ruler making donations (1987, 26). This

often took the form of sponsoring religious and community events of which theatre, dance, and music performances were an integral part. Literature and art of aristocratic groups celebrated their own belief systems in artistic and symbolic representations and often negatively depicted enemy kingdoms, political rivals and ascetics from other sects and religions systems. Courtly literature, particularly plays written after the seventh century AD, are replete with invectives against Buddhist and Jaina monks who are depicted as morally depraved and dishonest (ibid., 11). Musical performances, painting, and photography traditions associated with the erstwhile courts were often based on the lives and heroic deeds of real princes and members of the royal family. Barbara Stoller Miller has proposed that the poetry of Kalidasa was a direct portrait of the patron dynasty, kingship, and cosmic order, creating images of royal power (1999, 8-9). Ballads, rites, and theatrical performances were commissioned and managed by the courts and the composers and performers were mostly professionals earning their livelihood from this. Theatre scholars agree that while the dramatic structure of Sanskrit plays and their language had declined significantly by the tenth century, there was a parallel blossoming of existing regional forms of performance in vernacular languages. A possible reason for the decline of what would be labelled by the European Orientalist as 'classical' theatre, may have been foreign conquests that led to political and sovereign weakening of the native ruling regions and the creation of smaller rivaling princely states. Devangana Desai notes that the change in artistic activities is linked to changes in modes of production and in patron class and socio-religious institutions and ideologies (1990, 3). Farley P. Richmond et al. attribute the decline of the Sanskrit theatre to a combination of factors that allude to the changing patterns of monetary support and patronage to the theatre (1993, 83). The inability of the royalty and rich patrons to extend regular support to San-

sanskrit theatre in the face of foreign invasions and political instability meant that theatre artists and their groups needed to travel to perform and secure an alternate livelihood. As the language of a theatre that was now seeking wider audiences for its sustenance, Sanskrit would have been an impediment in communicating to larger masses of people who were either illiterate or for whom Sanskrit was not their lingua franca. Moreover, Sanskrit theatre's emphasis on poetry rather than dramatic action, dialogue, music, and dance may have been far removed from the regional traditional theatres like *Yakshagana*, *Jatra*, *Bhavai* and *Nautanki* or the popular variety of performance like *Ramlila* that attracted large audiences. Therefore, the decline of Sanskrit drama and theatre was equally an outcome of theatrical and aesthetic shifts made to its urban elite form in order to bring it closer to a new and wider mass of audiences beyond the court and urban cultural centres to the rural parts of the country. This was in the context of a fast-changing political and economic scenario that had already adversely impacted the traditional audience base and systems of royal patronage it had enjoyed thus far. Dharwadker contends that performance was relegated to the traditional, devotional, folk, and intermediary genres of the countryside in the period after the Central Asian invasions of India from eleventh century onwards as Islam disallowed human representation (2010, 174). The advent of Muslim rule in northern parts of India from sixteenth century onwards also contributed to the loss of patronage to Sanskrit drama. Given the limitations of language and the representative capacity of the idiom, the prestige and importance of Sanskrit theatre within the cultural landscape fell as the ancient Hindu aristocracy began to lose their prior political dominance and geographical control as the prestige and popularity of ancient Hindu kingdoms deteriorated, the popularity and patronage of the Sanskrit theatre, already limited by its linguistic and representative capacities, also declined (Schramm, 1968).

Vernacular Language Drama and Systems of Support

The traditional performance genres performed outside the courts in vernacular languages functioned as public entertainment, ritual, or religious festivals, and as the transmitter of shared cultural values to the large mass of small towns and rural audiences. Stuart H. Blackburn and A.K.Ramanujan argue that the resemblance between theatre forms like *Kathakali* and *Yakshagana* and the spirit cults in the neighbouring areas is too close to be missed (1986). The fact that many of these forms indulge unashamedly in scenes of terror, violence, and death—bidden in Sanskrit theatre—is surely attributable to their origins in folk ritual. They also served as an indispensable mode of communication given the limited access to formal educational skills of reading and writing which were the privilege of only a few. These forms of theatre and performance were also the modes through which moral and spiritual education were inculcated along with constant cultural orientation of the common people. Ritual performances were invited and paid for by the hosts—kings and nobles, temple priests, or the village community—to mark religious occasions like festivals or on social celebrations like births and marriages. In western India, *Dashavatar*, the post-harvest ritual performance was based on the stories of the ten incarnations of the Hindu God, Vishnu, and performed using a stylised language of gesture, movement, and declamatory delivery of dialogue. These performances often interspersed epic narratives with the glories of the patrons and their ancestors. The Tanjore king, Raja Shahji Bhosle, of the Bhosle Dynasty that ruled the Thanjavur Maratha kingdom until the British took it over at the end of the eighteenth century, had written plays between 1594 and 1664 and was a known patron of the arts. The Bhosle Rajas produced hand-written palm leaf manuscripts in Marathi based on the local form, the *Bhagwat Mela* and as some scholars argue, represent the beginnings of

Marathi drama. The popular and secular entertainment, '*Tamasha*', the sensuous song and dance performance that used satire and narrative, was created for the amusement of the Peshwa and Maratha armies in the eighteenth century and patronised by them for a hundred years. The Raja of Sangli commissioned Vishnudas Bhave, considered the pioneer of Marathi theatre, to create a dramatic entertainment suitable for his court and eventually a regular troupe of players devoted to theatrical presentations in return for land and income. From 1843 onwards, Bhave composed and staged plays on mythological narratives like *Sita Swayamwar* and *Raja Gopichandra* in Marathi language using the rich musical repertoire of the region, mixing elements from *Bharud*, *Tamasha*, *Lalit*, *Dasavatara*, and so on. He set narrative poems to music, using melodies from *Lavani* and *Keertan*, and the battle highlights from the *Bhagwat Mela* tradition, demonstrating a deep understanding of classical music. Other popular forms like the *Jatra*, *Nautanki*, *Khyal*, *Rasleela*, *Bhavai*, and *Maachor* also attracted courtly or aristocratic patronage.

Patronage and Colonialism

As feudal systems of power intersected with colonialism and its profiteering commercial practices of European traders and capitalists, cultural practices patronised by the Indian feudal landlords and princes witnessed a shift in financial support. The loss of courtly patronage to artists and performers due to the eventual decline of Indian rulers was only temporarily halted after the East India Company gained a foothold in Bengal in 1757. East India Company's acquisition of power over the princely state of Bengal marks a decisive moment in the colonial history of India that would only expand and consolidate the British stronghold over the next two millennia. The spirit of enterprise and gain that the British East India Company extended to the cultural life of the region impacted the arts and particularly theatre immensely. Artists and art works that

had some value to the expanding British administrative imperatives were commissioned to create artworks but the large mass of traditional performers remained outside of these new systems of patronage and had to migrate away from colonial centres in search of alternative livelihoods. The collapse of Mughal patronage and the delegitimisation of the Muslim courts after the rebellion of 1857 marginalised some performance traditions while stimulating others. Kathryn Hansen's research on the north Indian traditional form of *Nautanki* posits that, from the nineteenth century onwards, the form attracted patronage from the mercantile class of the urban centres as successors to Mughal and post-Mughal aristocracies (1992, 41). Carol Henderson argues that while elite patronage to music and dance was sustained in the rich princely states and those amongst the westernised Indian elite, yet, British indifference or even hostility to Indian music and dance meant little inclination to take over the paramount ruler's traditional patron role of support for the elite performing arts (2002, 163). Many traditional cultural practices underwent significant transformations under the conditions of political and cultural change inaugurated by the consolidation of British rule in India. During the early phase of colonialism, for the urban popular performance genres like *Nautanki*, the British filled in the vacancy of the benefactor-protector-patron role in line with their avowed policy of Orientalism (Hansen, 1992, 135). Dramatic performances once restricted in circulation due to royal and aristocratic patronage eventually transformed and became popular commodities of mass consumption. This trend gained even greater currency with the rise of a bourgeois middle class and the resultant changes to public space, work, and the notion of leisure. The aesthetic and financial interventions made by the British to these popular genres as well as the urban stage included the introduction of the proscenium frame and classic texts of the Western dramatic cannon, the emergence of commercially success-

ful theatre repertoires in a secular urban context. But the advent of a modern urban westernised theatre not only dislodged and relocated the ritual, religious, and communitarian context of performance to the newly secular and commercial; it also meant a change in the theatre form itself from a largely improvisatory, performance led, composite entertainment to text based and realistic modern theatre performed on proscenium stages. In this regard, the colonial policy on culture was double edged: cultural denigration or destruction on the one hand and cultural hegemonization on the other.

What constitutes theatre and what remains out of its definition has been a question constantly contested. The colonial period saw a keen interest in this question, with the early Orientalists understanding it radically differently than how it was perceived so far and how it is understood today. There was a clear shift from the written tradition of drama to the performance of composite forms after the decline of Sanskrit theatre. What also followed was a shift in aesthetic and moral regimes associated with the drama and sanctioned by the *Natyashastra*, leading to a denigration of both the performer and the form. With respect to theatre, it is agreed upon by scholars now that the decline of Sanskrit as an instrument of cultural expression was one of its most serious casualties in the state theatre and dramatic writing, besides literary criticism, poetry etc. (Deshpande, 1987, 2170)

Theatre and Its Modern Infrastructure

Theatre scholarship of the late nineteenth century amply demonstrates a flourishing theatre landscape comprising both amateur dramatic activity, mushrooming growth of commercial theatres, and professional actors travelling from England to perform in city theatres. It is interesting to note that while theatre of the European kind—text based, realistic narratives on a commer-

cial stage—was new to the Indian cultural landscape, its influence on the culture of the city of Calcutta was deep and long standing. This was due, perhaps, in part to the early arrival of English-style playhouses and regular theatre productions. The influence of British theatre became part of colonial cultural life as early as 1757, when the English-style playhouses were constructed by the early British settlers in Calcutta— providing entertainment to British officers stationed away from their familiar cultural and social environment in England. Utpal Banerjee's detailed study of the old theatres of Calcutta, provides interesting details of the Calcutta Theatre, or the New Playhouse (1775), the most important of them, constructed under the patronage of the then Governor-General, Warren Hastings and Sir Eliza Implay (1999). These English language theatres, including the Private Theatre (1789) and the Whaler Place Theatre (1797), were meant to entertain the British audience of officers, merchants, clerks, and 'adventurers' associated with the East India Company. They enjoyed the patronage of the British officials and offered the expatriate British community a profitable business avenue. These theatres were jointly owned by the leading members of the city including many British civil servants who invested both money and time in their construction and sustenance. The cultured elite amongst the British inhabitants became its members and regular audiences. The interiors of the theatres were elaborately decorated and well-lit, audience seating was organised in pits and boxes emulating the Elizabethan prototype. The model for the playhouse in the colonies came from the theatrical arrangements and architecture of the mother country including the popular proscenium stage, from the London theatres such as Covent Garden and Drury Lane. The steep admission tickets were meant to defray the expenses of the house and restrict entry to only rich Europeans. Shakespeare, Sheridan, Congreve, and Massinger were regularly performed with great detail and gusto by amateur British

actors who did not seek professional remuneration for performing. It is interesting to note that a heightened and regular theatrical activity demonstrated by the construction of many playhouses in Calcutta had already begun while the city was still a British military outpost, much before it became the capital of British India. H.N. Dasgupta traces the popularity of the English theatre, The Playhouse in 1776, even before the government passed from the hands of the ruling Nawab to the East India Company (1934, 177).

Other theatres followed, most notably the Chowringhee (1813), the private subscription theatre, along with the Sans Souci (1839) that influenced the educated Bengalis to have a stage of their own and become the frontrunner in the theatrical experimentation of the period. Many educated Bengalis became regular audiences and patrons of these theatres where English dramas were routinely staged, inculcating a taste for the European theatrical form. Theatre scholars also agree that while theatre activity of this kind was initially restricted to British audiences, theatre going and production spread amongst the local elite and intelligentsia quickly leading to regular stagings of European plays in local theatres and educational institutions. P. Guha-Thakurta elaborates:

They had, of course, their Yatras and performances of similar nature, but with the coming of new ideas they were beginning to be dissatisfied with them. In the English playhouses they discovered for the first time an entirely novel and, indeed, more profitable source of entertainment and conceived a desire to make full use of it and to adapt it... (1974, 40.)

European theatres immediately captured the Bengali urban intelligentsia's imagination as instruments of pleasure and education, better suited than the existing traditional performance forms.

Under the patronage of the Bengali intelligentsia or the *Babu* class, theatrical entertainment in Calcutta produced replicas of British theatre both in English and in translated vernacular languages as well as translations of Sanskrit classics with native actors. These performances were markedly distinct from the popular indigenous entertainments of the city and the countryside in both the space used for performance as well as their subjects and characters. The three-sided or circular performance space was discarded in favour of the frontal viewing experience of the proscenium theatre. The performers came from the newly English-educated elite classes for whom theatre was an expression of a sophisticated new culture, a rational pastime, and a marker of respectable status in society. Theatre-going became part of the cultural and social life of elite Bengalis, who in turn used theatre to assert their claim to an invented indigenous culture in contradistinction to the folk and popular musical performance genres that were considered rude, corrupt, and indecorous entertainment. Performance forms like *Jatra*, with their lyrical and operatic style, characters drawn from popular mythological narratives and emotions conveyed through song, dance, and music were increasingly losing favour with the upper and middle class audiences in the city. Samik Bandhyopadhyay clarifies that the “Jatra was two-thirds song; the dialogue, improvised during the performance by illiterate players, had no literary distinction ... Jatra used no scenery or permanent stage” (1971, 238). For the emergent regional intelligentsia, newly educated in the language, culture, and history of the coloniser, popular forms like *Jatra* were neither modern in the Western theatrical sense nor did they embody the purity and authenticity recently ascribed to the classical tradition of Sanskrit drama.

Even though the first attempt to produce a play in Bengali was made as early as 1795 by the Russian explorer Gerasim Stepanovich Lebedeff in Calcutta, this experiment did not succeed

in creating a tradition of Western-style Bengali theatre. The historical account of Lebedeff's Bengali theatre, recounted in R. K. DasGupta's essay, 'G. S. Lebedev: The Founder of the Bengali Theatre' (1963), offers an insight into what would emerge as the Bengali public theatre over the next five decades. Lebedeff sought permission from the Governor-General, Sir John Shore for a license to perform the Bengali translation of the play, *Disguise*, with a mixed cast of men and women, using poetry by the famous poet Bharat Chandra Roy (1712-1760) put to Indian and European music between the acts. The performances ran on ticketed shows, both the stage and auditorium were decorated in the Bengali style and advertisements were carried in newspapers like the *Calcutta Gazette*. Despite the several innovations that were made on the early Bengali stage, it underwent a significant change in form, content, aesthetics, and politics only in the mid-nineteenth century. Hindu Theatre (1831) of Prasanna Kumar Tagore and Nabin Krishna Bose's Shyambazar Theatre (1833), located inside his own house, emerged as two prime theatre establishments of the early modern Bengali theatre. As proprietors and patrons both were men of wealth and rank, representative of the educated Indian elite and middle classes for whom theatre became an important aspect of self-refashioning and cultural appraisal.

Sudipto Chatterjee identifies the early years of upper class patronage for private theatres (1830-60) as a definitive move towards commercialisation of the theatre (2007). The need for the Bengalis to have their own theatre—owned and managed by them, for the educated and newly emergent middle-class audiences, and in their own language—led to the birth of the Great National Theatre in 1872. This marks the beginning of full-fledged commercial activity on the proscenium stage and the democratisation of the public theatre. It also anchored the patriotic and reformist dramas of the time that politicised the urban stage in Bengal, a trend that gathered mo-

mentum with Dinabandhu Mitra's *Nil-Darpan* (1872) and Upendranath Das' *Surendra Vinodhini* (1876) and led the British government to pass the Dramatic Performances Act of 1876 to legislate over and control the stage. Modelled on the London theatres of the great European theatrical tradition, public theatres like the Great National, interestingly staged Bengali plays dealing primarily with social issues, historical narratives, and mythological stories. This was a unique Western-style Bengali drama that was "not 'really' Indian, not 'really' British, [but] its own particular hybrid" (Schechner, 2007, xx). The invention of a new form, language, and institutional practices have been seen by theatre scholars as characteristic of a unique hybridity that parallels "the hybridity of the native intelligentsia" whose theatrical expression this was (Chatterjee, S., 2007, 15). For Homi Bhabha cultural hybridity refers to spaces 'in-between' the designations of identity, the "interstices" in which "domains of difference `` may"overlap `` (1994, 1-6). These spaces articulate and embody cultural differences and challenge our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenising, unifying force, authenticated by the originary past (37). Following Helen Gilbert, "hybridity has been used as a political strategy in various forms and contexts to deliberately circulate historically marginalised knowledge and practices as a means of destabilising the power of the dominant culture" (1997, 4). The nineteenth-century Bengali theatre in Calcutta, which would have been impossible without British influence, but equally unable to be contained or explained by limited Anglo-European models offers a glimpse into the mechanisms by which colonial discourse and domination are threatened. For Bhabha, the colonial subject is always resistant, constructed in "a repertoire of conflictual positions" that render him or her "the site of both fixity and fantasy" (1983, 204). Sudipto Chatterjee unpacks this inherent paradox between the Bengali Hindu literati's emulation or even adoration of the 'other' while at the same time be-

ing intent on having their own ‘national’ theatre and sees this as demonstrating a unique cultural hybridity (2009, 99). He locates in the paradigms of nineteenth century Bengali theatre, the assertion of a native ‘self-hood’ in relation to an emergent nation. British official policy of Orientalism that had led to the ‘re-discovery and re-inscription’ of classical Indian languages and literature as the epitome of the Indian culture achieved a dual purpose—the native elite’s reverence for the Indian cultural past, as materialised through the study of ancient Sanskrit language and literature, including drama theatre, as well as a derision for its present. The Orientalist re-inscription of the Indian identity resulted in classicising the Sanskrit tradition of playwriting and establishing the authority of the *Natyashastra* and deeming tradition, form, or practice of the present as unworthy and corrupt. The emergent theatrical modernity of the late nineteenth century demonstrates British colonial administration’s successful “[subjectification] of the native and his culture into a frame that would at one and the same time be native and foreign” (Chatterjee, 2007, 100).

As part of the larger nationalist enterprise of inventing an indigenous culture through dramatic literature and theatre beyond the Sanskrit models, Michael Madhusudan Datta (1824-73), wrote some of the earliest original Bengali literature (with its own blank verse, sonnet, and epic) including plays. In searching for a new Bengali drama he sought inspiration from Shakespeare and the conventions of the Elizabethan stage, Greek, English, and French literary texts and philosophies, embracing a unique literary and dramatic hybridity and infusing a degree of ambivalence into the act of communication between cultures. Hybridity, as Bhabha argues negates cultural hegemony through the use of mimicry, fetishism, and parody, asserting that “the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can

be appropriated, translated, re-historicised, and read anew” (1988, 21). Following Dutt, several original Bengali plays were written on social issues by a host of playwrights and staged in the public theatres of Calcutta. They demonstrated a strong fidelity to the tenets of Sanskrit theatre while at the same time launching a strong trend of social drama that would politicise modern urban theatre.

While modern urban theatre began as an imitation of the colonial English theatres of Calcutta, by the late nineteenth century it developed into a broad-based entertainment responding to the growing middle class audiences in cities like Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. G. P. Deshpande notes that, barring chronological differences between different linguistic regions of colonial India, there are marked similarities of trends and tendencies in Indian theatres and literature that owe their origins to the colonial experience (1987, 2170). These similarities relate both to their aesthetic and creative aspects but also can be extended to similarities of political currents that they were affected by and the cultural sensibilities that they enacted as a response. First institutionalised in the colonial metropolis, modern Indian theatre epitomises the conditions of colonial dominance and its changing instruments of control, both exercised indirectly on culture through initiatives on education, employment, and their access to the native population and later directly through the execution of policies of access to performances and censorship. With respect to modern Marathi theatre, Deshpande comments on the use of theatre as a form of entertainment and its pivotal role as resistance against colonialism among the people:

The fact that drama is born within twenty-five years of the fall of the Peshwa regime...was most certainly a silent protest against imperialism; but more importantly, it was an attempt by the aristocratic class which had brought about its own political

downfall, to seek its identity in a new field of activity, and closely re-examine its own face (Quoted in Gokhale, S., 2000, 3).

In Maharashtra, the British ascension to power was patient and gradual due to the political feuds between the Maratha fiefdoms who eventually surrendered to the British by 1818. The absence of territorial conquest and unending wars under the Marathas in the last hundred and fifty years along with the British policy of peaceful and efficient administration set the context for the cultural efflorescence of the region. The influence of European stage practices in the theatres of Bombay, the establishment of Bombay University in 1857 as well as the mushrooming of colleges in Pune, Kolhapur, and other parts of Maharashtra following the Indian Education Act in 1835, introduced the English educated upper-class and upper-caste Marathi intelligentsia to a whole spectrum of European cultural, social, and political fields including the literary legacies of Shakespearean drama and Romantic poetry that appeared far more refined than the crude *Sangeet Naatak* or the popular musical forms like *Tamasha*. Shanta Gokhale posits that “the land-owning, aristocratic, or caste empowered members of the older feudal order gradually lost their cultural leadership to urban, university-educated young men, also from the upper castes, but exposed to new ideas from the West” (2000, 10). The wide exposure to Sanskrit and European classics that were studied and translated in these new institutions, created a new kind of drama, structured on the Shakespearean play, breaking away from the musical legacy of the regional past. The ‘Bookish’ *natak* or prose plays from 1857 onwards with only dialogue and no music, used history rather than mythology for their narrative material. These plays drew from both Sanskrit and Shakespearean plays and were an early model for what emerged as the modern Marathi drama. The emerging middle class admired the Western social and political ideas and their ad-

ministrative ingenuity, even emulating Western ways of life and their cultural expressions. At the same time, the growing sophistication of theatre-going audiences with a cultivated taste for music and a newfound appreciation for their own cultural traditions, particularly Sanskrit drama, coupled by a surging nationalist ethos since the events of 1857, led to a new form of musical drama which served the cultural needs of the people. Tales from mythological narratives or from historical themes were recreated in musical performances to assert the Marathi identity and performance culture against the colonial onslaught. Maya Pandit remarks that nineteenth century Marathi theatre was “essentially a native response given to the processes of modernisation unleashed by the colonial encounter” (2002, 36). Annasaheb Kirloskar’s *Sangeet Natak* or the *Sangeet Rangabhumi* were formal experiments made to the classical vocal tradition for the theatre stage. Deshpande describes the interpolation as “a *natya git* (the lyric in the musical) demonstrated all the features of a raga in encapsulated form... [while the raga itself was] rendered self-consciously in a theatrical form” (1987, 2175). This reclaiming of a lost heritage in order to create a new idiom that had visible marks of Western playwriting and performance. Beginning with *Shakuntal* in 1880, Kirloskar’s theatre marked a departure from the *Bhave* style of dramatic presentation that relied on storytelling through music and the use of *Sutradhar*/narrator to introduce the characters and the dramatic plot. *Sangeet naatak*, introduced the Western notion of the ‘character’ whose speech, song, and movements expressed and embodied their thoughts and feelings, while retaining the dominance of traditional music and singing to convey information, create the mood of the scene, and take forward the narrative of the play. Marking the difference between the two, Shanta Gokhale argues that while the prose plays “needed to use rhetoric, hyperbole and ‘poetic’ images to colour speech when an elevated mood had to be created”, “the early *Sangeet*

natak, which would have been condemned as ‘unnatural’ because its characters sang, was in some ways actually more ‘natural’ than the prose play” (2000, 19). Along with Kirloskar’s *Shakuntal*, Govind Ballal Deval’s *Sharada* (1899) became very popular performances that many theatre groups reproduced all over Maharashtra, creating a template for the popular Marathi musical play. With the widespread economic and political unrest in the country and the specific interventions of the colonial government in Hindu social customs, the Marathi stage became a space for articulating and debating public opinion pertaining to social issues like marriage, widow-remarriage, education of women in a caste-based Marathi society, etc.. The popularity of *Sangeet Natak* and mythological drama gradually palled on the audience who were drawn towards social and national implications of the colonial rule. Plays like *Manapaman* (‘Honour and Dishonour’) and *Keechak Vadh* occupied the stage and a number of social dramas that dealt with issues like dowry and widow re-marriage were performed regularly in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. From hereon, the dramatist occupied a key role in Marathi theatre with S.K.Kolhatkar, Ram Ganesh Gadkari and Mama Warerkar .

In South India, the processes of modernisation and politicisation entered the theatre only towards the end of the nineteenth century with the emergence of popular, commercial drama as a political instrument. The performances by commercial itinerant drama companies of Parsis and Marathis in Madras, the winter capital of the Madras Presidency, were followed by a growing number of local travelling companies offering popular theatricals that reached wide and varied audiences of the region and created newer forms and styles of performance. ‘Special drama’, was a kind of virtuoso performance based on standard adaptations of mythological stories and drew its name from the fact that each actor was hired specifically for the performance of a role that he/

she specialised in, making the theatre event a special one. As a hybrid form of theatre that developed in the late nineteenth century and transformed from largely rural to an urban performance form, finally returning to a middle ground, what A.K. Ramanujan describes as “rurban”, it had, by the 1920s, become a popular mode of mass entertainment (2004, 72). The growing involvement of popular theatre in the political struggle in South India at the end of the nineteenth century can be ascribed to its commercialism that broke the barriers of caste and class, playing into the emerging national consciousness beginning to take shape in the region (Baskaran, T., 2009, 132-34). The intensification of political activities after the demand for Home Rule, the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat movements in 1919, and most importantly the Jallianwala Bagh massacre led to theatre moving away from the mythological towards political propaganda through the enactment of actual contemporary events on the stage. Drama companies based in Guntur, the epicentre of theatrical activity in the Telugu-speaking region of Madras Presidency, led the political wave in producing documentary-dramas, propagating the views of nationalist leaders like Gandhi and Tilak. They used folk music, ballads, local storytelling forms like *Harikatha*, and street performance to reach out to the masses. These performances were patronised by the land-owning zamindars and supported by the viewing public.

The city-based elite and bourgeois theatres as well as the amateur drama clubs on the other hand, were a distinct variety fuelled by the access to and interest in English language and literature, especially Shakespeare, and the recently discovered Sanskrit classics. They did not have any noticeable impact on the popular company productions. With the weakening of old belief systems of the urban elite, the import and circulation of new ideas from Western education and new forms of political organisations, the educated elite came to associate the cause of national-

ism and nationhood to the urgent need for social reform (ibid., 137). While the popular theatre underwent political and aesthetic transformation through “the use of songs, depiction of social reform and the use of allegorical and directly political themes” the elite condemnation and apathy towards the popular, particularly in Madras, grew (ibid.,143). The new reformist or social dramas served as the link between the urban legitimate theatre and the popular theatre that borrowed heavily from the existing traditional forms. These reformist plays first infused the mythological stories with political situations and later switched to historical drama with a nationalist appeal. The focus on dialogue, patriotic songs based on folk and classical music, and acting produced some of the most hard-hitting social plays like Pammal Sambanda Mudaliyar’s *Dasi Prem* and *Kooturavu*; Palavar’s *Pathi Bhakthi*, *Khaddarin Vetri*, *Desiya Kodi* etc using political and national symbols like the spinning wheel and the flag to mobilise public opinion against British rule. Interestingly, the outbreak of the First World War and the British fear of anti-war propaganda led to government suspicion of the stage and its power of political mobilisation. Bhaskaran notes that while the earlier drama companies in Guntur, like the ‘Tilak Natak Samajam’ that staged popular plays, had been granted annual licenses to perform, it was only in 1919 that the provisions of the Dramatic Performances Act of 1876, which had hitherto remained uninvoked in South India, were delayed to surveil and control the stage (ibid., 139). So far legal provisions under the Madras City Police Act of 1888 had been used to elicit information on any performance to be held and to prohibit it if found to interfere with public order or decency, but provisions of the DPA were exercised only now to maintain a register of approved plays, i.e., there was now the need to get all plays approved and registered before production. A renewed wave of political vitality was experienced with Gandhi’s invocation of the civil disobedience movement in a the-

atrical environment that had become heavily restricted due to government control and censorship and many Guntur drama companies and groups found ways of circumventing the application of the law, or even openly defying restrictive orders. In Madurai, the headquarters of theatre in the Tamil-speaking area, Tamil Nadu Actors Association (1928) provided the organisational framework for theatre artists' political involvement.

Gujarat became part of the British Empire much later than Bengal which had been converted into a colonial state by 1765. It was only as late as 1817-18 that Gujarat was integrated into the Bombay Presidency, with Bombay as the economic and administrative centre. The history of the city of Ahmedabad offers a unique trajectory of economic and intellectual developments in the nineteenth century, setting it apart from other parts of India and other industrial cities like Bombay in terms of its social and literary activities, the nature of British intervention in urban life, and the tension and juxtaposition between 'tradition' and 'modernity' (Joshi, Svati, 2004, 327). In her account, Ahmedabad emerged as a major textile centre dependent on powerful merchant elites with sophisticated banking networks throughout the country by the end of the nineteenth century, impacting the development of the Gujarati professional theatre. The Gujarat Vernacular Society, founded by Alexander Kinloch Forbes in 1848 began documenting the history of Gujarat including the language and literature of its small dynasties and their oral culture, on the lines of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. While its status as a new industrial enterprise opened new occupational opportunities, the British intervention remained only administrative, with a marked absence of a dominant Western-educated professional middle class or even a comprador class. Joshi notes that there was neither higher education in English nor was there an English Press in the city in the nineteenth century. Unlike Bombay, Calcutta, or even Madras, Ahmedabad re-

mained strikingly bereft of any literary political articulations of early nationalism. But a stable traditional social system with *Mahajans*, *Nagar Sheth*, and the artisan class meant regular migration of Gujaratis to Bombay in search of opportunities provided by English education. The mercantile community of Gujarat, particularly its Parsis, had been migrating from Gujarat to Bombay from the eighteenth century onwards, exposing them to a mosaic of modern urban culture in a multiethnic and multilingual context. They collaborated with the Europeans and made extraordinary fortunes from trade between Europe and India and to the Far East, particularly the opium trade to China earning huge profits in commission and dominated finance, banking, and insurance. As middle class Parsis sought British education first at the University of Bombay and then at the Elphinstone College in the second half of the nineteenth century, the amateur college theatricals became fashionable amongst the young Parsis and paved the way for what would emerge as the popular Parsi theatre.

The Parsi theatre contributed a new theatrical model that was based on commercialisation and professionalisation, used traditional performances on European-style proscenium stages and created unique viewing experiences through innovative stage technologies. The entrepreneurial capital and prestige of the wealthy Parsi patrons, the high social standing of its actors, and a lively theatrical culture of intersecting practices of Parsi, Gujarati, and Marathi theatres in Bombay from 1853 to 1931 created this first nationally popular theatre and as Anuradha Kapur argues, “the first ‘modern’ phase of Indian theatre” (2004, 87). Opening of the Grand Road Theatre in 1846 broadened the audience base to include the working class and its “horizon of expectations” (Thakur, V. S, 2020, 51) in a fast urbanising and industrialising modern city like Bombay. The first company to be formed was the Parsi Theatrical Company in 1853 whose per-

formances in the very first year are considered to be the beginnings of Parsi theatre. Kathryn Hansen notes that for the first twenty years of its development, the Parsi stage was an amateur enterprise performed and supported by enthusiastic young students, mostly Parsi, and an older generation of people who were active in public life. She argues that it was never a bastion of linguistic plurality and until the 1870s plays were written mainly in Gujarati, the first language of the Bombay Parsis (2003, 383-88). Other studies by scholars of modern theatre convincingly argue that Parsi theatre transcended its originative moment of the Parsi community's dramatic, technological, and commercial innovations in the theatre, and should be analysed as a full fledged genre of theatre that borrowed heavily from existing musical traditions like *Bhavai*, *Garba*, *Khayal*, *Lavani*, as well as the rich Urdu tradition of poetry and lyric rather than an etymologically defined community specific affair (Somnath Gupt, 1981 and Willmer, 1999). Its defining characteristics included melodramatic and sensational plots; song and dance; use of the proscenium arch; painted curtains and backdrop' Western stage furniture and props; mechanical devices for staging special effects like lightning, rain, and storm or the magical appearance or disappearance of a gods or other characters; creation of a stage spectacle; and a system of professionally paid actors in the repertory style. Artists were commissioned to paint the scenery, and the latest in 'elaborate appliances' were regularly ordered from England, so as to achieve "the wonderful stage effects of storms, seas or rivers in commotion, castles, sieges, steamers, aerial movements and the like" (Yajnik, R. K., 1933, 97-113). Beyond its Parsi Gujarati beginnings, the genre developed through its use of Hindi and Urdu, the lingua franca of the Northern region and most accessible to a large population of theatre-goers, along with Marathi and Bengali, whichever was necessary for comic skits, improvised interludes, and songs. Its initial Parsi play

texts based on martial legends from the Persian *Shahnameh* and *Arabian Nights*, familiar to the affluent Parsis, and adaptations of popular enlightenment plays of Sheridan and Shakespeare, were expanded to include stories from the Hindu epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, along with contemporary social dramas. Its linguistic and thematic hybridity and cosmopolitanism is reflected in its later themes as well as the use of Hindi and Urdu along with Gujarati as the languages of its plays, playwrights, and actors. At the peak of its popularity from the 1880s to the 1930s, the Parsi theatre employed 'Indian' themes and subject matter as well as a great deal of music and dance, which were important characteristics of the existing and extant Indian dramatic tradition. So while the existing traditional theatre practice and drama influenced the Parsi theatre, the latter also exerted a counter-effect on indigenous theatre. Vikram Thakur argues that the reason to adopt Urdu as its preferred language of production from the 1870s onwards was primarily to address issues of respectability of its growing middle class audiences due to the use of traditional folk music and dance and the presence of folk performers on the Parsi stage (2020, 64-65). With the establishment of the Victoria Theatrical Company in 1868, the Parsi theatre entered a period of capitalist reorganisation and professionalisation that reached not only cities and provincial towns but even rural parts of the country. Much of the reputation of the Parsi theatre was earned through regular traveling of its productions, with several regional companies springing up under the influence of the first few. Music, dance, and dramatic performances so far have been restricted in circulation to either the Indian metropolis as a private entertainment of the rich and educated, or by aristocratic patronage of the ruling classes. It was through the wider entrepreneurial activities of playwriting, performing, traveling, and theatre going that Parsi theatre transformed it into a commodity of mass consumption, a public affair for the new bourgeois class. It is worth

noting that the appropriation of European stage technologies, new style of playwriting, and performing also worked at deepening the divide between the older theatrical system supported by the court and countryside and this new public of the metropolis that was using theatre as a marker of its cultural identity.

Chapter 2

Assembling Colonial Cultural Policy in India: Education, Press, and Public Theatre

The administrative, economic, and ideological aspects of colonialism form the historical context for the emergence of public theatre as a modern institution and a new cultural genre in the colonial capitals and urban-centres of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras in the nineteenth century. It was a direct result of the colonial encounter and the influence of Western theatre aesthetics patronised by the Indian elite. As nineteenth century colonial policies on education and language, based on orientalist notions of cultural and civilizational superiority, furthered colonial interests of economic gain and domination, theatre became a profitable enterprise and a popular way of disseminating British culture to the native elites. Concomitantly, a new national consciousness emerged in the late nineteenth century, especially in the newly emergent middle class that was well-versed in colonial education. Newer modes of theatrical expressions developed that echoed the anti-colonial and nationalist discourse, impacting theatre and performance significantly. Early colonial interventions in the realm of culture such as education policy, the setting up of educational institutions, the arrival of the printing press, and the democratising of vernacular publishing had a profound impact on what would emerge as modern Indian theatre and performance culture.

The analogous fields of education, press, and theatre constituted the nineteenth century urban public culture that was the signpost of colonial modernity. After all, the standardisation of new linguistic idioms invented in the nineteenth century, particularly the new Bengali drama and narrative prose that borrowed heavily from modern European languages, especially English, par-

alleled the growth of public theatre, and fuelled the demand and varied use of printed literature. This chapter considers colonial interventions made from the late eighteenth century onwards in these fields as the beginning of a process of colonial cultural policymaking that reached a definite fruition with the capture and control of theatre and performance with the passing of the Dramatic Performances Act. Moreover, actions by the colonial state in these cultural domains reflect the larger cultural politics of the time. Even though these early colonial initiatives, for the most part, were not pitched to affect the art and performance arena, they contributed unwittingly to impact the development of modernity through arts in India. They also directly, indirectly, and progressively impacted theatre's historical relationship to the state. Questions of 'modernity' and 'tradition'; the discourse of 'roots' and 'authenticity' that have continued to occupy theatre practice; and the discursive frames of policymaking in postcolonial India can be traced back to nineteenth century colonial policies.

This chapter analyses three specific colonial policies enacted in the heyday of British colonialism in India from the mid to late nineteenth century—between 1835-1878. These policies pertain to the interconnected domains of language and education, vernacular press and publication, and finally, theatre and dramatic literature. This chapter aims to weave together the braided histories and contemporaneous development of these policy domains. It is argued that even though the explicit policy on dramatic activity, the Dramatic Performances Act, was enacted in 1876, the theoretical and ideological premise of a cultural policy based on the historical framework of orientalism had already existed. The administrative claims on education, language development, and press and publishing had started to be made as early as the nineteenth century and had impacted theatre and performance practice implicitly. The Dramatic Performances Act of

1876 established a legal basis for the colonial government to prohibit performances deemed defamatory and threatening to the government as well as those likely to deprave and corrupt persons present in such performances.

Introduction: Unpacking Cultural Legacies of Orientalism

In Said's analysis, Orientalism is a system of knowledge about the orient that expresses and represents itself and its other, the European material civilization, "culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, ...even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles" (2014, 2). It is, therefore, as much a cultural as a political process that creates a whole network of interests and hierarchical relationships between the Occident and the Orient, the coloniser and the colonised, writ with power and domination. The former asserts its political and cultural dominance over the latter through the operations of cultural hegemony. In India, the workings of British Orientalism and its cultural enterprise resulted in a set of strategically devised systems by which the British government would function as a 'paternal protectorate', i.e., through indirect rule rather than through the force of British law. This necessitated two related domains of governmental control. Firstly, as Partha Chatterjee demonstrates, in the legal sphere through the construction of a colonial legal system from native jurisprudence (1993, 64-72), and secondly, it can be argued, in the parallel sphere of culture. Here, culture refers not to the arts of the colony, but to the entire way of life, forms of knowledge, institutions, and self-understanding. The indigenous elite, educated in the English education system, were co-opted into ruling with the British, facilitating the government and policies of the colonizer. Resonating Edward Said, this was cultural hegemony at work, the form of cultural leadership operating not through domination from the top but within civil society by consent, through

the sheer force and power of cultural leadership of the elite, its dominant ideas and institutions (1978, 12-15). Despite its varied application across domains of native cultural life in the changing political circumstances of eighteenth and nineteenth century India, Orientalism and its approach to governance formed the consistent and continuing basis of a cultural programme of colonial rule and cultural policy.

Orientalism actively shaped the relations between forms of colonial knowledge and the exercise of imperial power. The knowledge that was useful to the (colonial) state became the knowledge that was deemed useful for humanity universally. Orientalism as an “official policy” was adopted between 1774-1785 during the tenure of Governor-General Warren Hastings, who aimed at creating “an Orientalized service elite competent in Indian languages and responsive to Indian traditions” (Kopf, 1980, 500). This policy of working through existing institutions rather than enforcing new ones, tolerance for native customs, and promotion of oriental language and literature, particularly through the education system, defined the early colonial approach to culture. The underlying assumption was that if the British merchants and administrators became more responsive to Indian traditions, they would be able to carry out their business more effectively. It necessitated what Viswanathan calls “reverse acculturation,” or a system of government where its administrators fit seamlessly into the fabric of daily indigenous life by changing their approach rather than forcing foreign policies on the colonized subjects (2015, 28). The need to know and classify colonial subjects (in order to rule over them) effectively became a determining logic of policies of the period from 1786 onwards when Lord Cornwallis, the new Governor of Bengal, abandoned the policy of Orientalism, breaking away from sympathetic orientalism and its forms of colonial governance and control. The coloniser's continued presence and rationalisa-

tion of its expanding legal and administrative apparatus depended on knowing its subjects, particularly where limitations of unfamiliar language and complex cultural traditions made the task even more challenging.

Institutionalising Education and Culture

The setting up of the earliest institutions of modern knowledge in India were attempts at intervening in the colony's culture and education to fulfil the need for British administrators proficient in vernacular language and customs to govern the natives better. The setting up of archival and educational institutions like Asiatic Society of Bengal (1784), Sreerampore Mission Press, and Fort William college (both in 1800) were interventions enacted in the sphere of education and directed towards long-term cultural transformation. The Asiatic Society of Bengal, founded at the initiative of William Jones, undertook, encouraged, and propagated knowledge about Indian history, philosophy, religion, language, and art as well as law, trade, and manufacture. Tejaswini Niranjana sums up the most crucial interventions of William Jones with respect to culture—the translation of ancient Indian texts as a way of interpreting 'Indian' culture to Indians more reliably; the desire to be a 'lawgiver', giving back to Indians their own laws; and, the task of 'purifying' Indian culture, speaking on its behalf (1992, 13). Many of these early institutions were created specifically for purposes of survey, enumeration, and classification of native land into economic, archeological, and demographic categories and defining the historical, anthropological, and epidemiological characteristics of its people. These interventions worked towards creating a view of the Indian present as uncivilised, insufficient, and uncultured in relation to its

own past, positing the coloniser's ability to understand, appreciate, and translate its essence fully, thereby attributing to himself cultural and moral superiority.

The forms of governance, institutionalisation, and production of scholarship of the late eighteenth century were based on orientalist thinking that projected an ambiguously respectful attitude towards native cultural past and inheritance. One of the main planks for this was the creation of a glorious cultural and historical past through celebrating ancient Indian texts and encouraging their literary translations. William Jones' English translation of the Sanskrit play *Shakuntala* in 1789, equated the genius of Kalidasa with Shakespeare, and re-animated a resplendent Hindu past. With this, drama as a genre of literary culture acquired a preeminent position, "making Indian theatre synonymous with the poetically exquisite "national theatre of hindus" exemplified by Kalidasa" (Dharwarkar, 2011, 425). Revival of classical drama was a crucial part of the continuum of colonial actions on education that focussed on the discipline of English literature, rediscovery and translation of Indian classical texts, and teaching of English and Sanskrit in universities. While the early orientalist approach to governing focused on disrupting the Indian way of life as little as possible to minimize reasons for revolt and discontent among the indigenous population, it is important to underline that it did not translate into a continued or consistent British encouragement or patronage towards native traditions or systems of learning.

Language and the struggle over linguistic hegemony became prime instruments of the policy of orientalism. This led to changes in the entire linguistic economy of the period through school and college education, translation activity, standardisation through dictionaries. and dissemination through the printing press. The standardization of Indian languages through teaching,

compiling, and publishing dictionaries was done primarily to promote them as instruments of statecraft, commerce, and law, a use that the vernacular languages had not been put to so far. Schools instructing in native Indian languages and the vernacular translation of several Sanskrit texts created new vistas before the natives in the use of their own language (Deshpande, 1987, 2171). New languages with invented cultural affiliations were created that contributed, unwittingly, to modern cultural expression. For example, Ronald Stuart McGregor argues that the emergence of Hindi, as distinct from Hindustani, was based on the vocabulary of northern regional and local dialects, closer to Sanskrit rather than Persian (2001, 28-9). A similar story of British benevolence towards Indian languages is to be found in the histories of the evolution of modern Bengali (Deshpande, 1987). This period also marks the prominence of prose as a literary genre superseding the value of pre-colonial traditions of oral literature and poetry. The evolution of prose as a mode of cultural expression, "the vehicle of philosophic exposition, and religious, and social polemic" in various Indian languages in the mid-nineteenth century was greatly facilitated by the printing press (J.C. Ghosh, 1949, 107). This phase of 'sympathetic colonialism', as Sudipto Chatterjee notes, "directly or indirectly, gave the British intelligentsia clear and open access to materials that they would use continually to fashion a sense of cultural inheritance that would infiltrate all modes of cultural expression, from language to literature to art to music to theatre" (1995, 21).

With respect to the sphere of education, Vishwanathan argues that the humanistic functions associated with literature—"shaping of character, the development of aesthetic sense or the discipline of ethical thinking"- became essential to the colonial socio-political control of what was deemed knowledgeable and how it was to be instructed' (2015, 3). The aims of education

were thus tied to the ideological underpinnings of literature and its forms of circulation. The reading and understanding of literature, the ability to differentiate decency from indecency were reflective of the mental and intellectual capacities of the reader, an attribute thought to be squarely missing in the native learner who had first to be brought up to the desired level of competence through instruction in Western aesthetic principles. No Indian literary texts were introduced for study in Indian schools and colleges as they were marked as immoral and impure. Scholars attribute the institutionalisation of the discipline of literature in colonial India to its surrogate function of disseminating and propagating tradition, value, and moral authority, a task undertaken by the church in England. It is interesting to note that English literature appeared as a subject in the curriculum of the colonies long before it was institutionalized in the home country. Owing to the existence of a learned Indian class that exerted both power and influence over the Indian masses, as well as the contentious policy of religious neutrality that disabled a religious curriculum in India comparable to the British, education in colonial India was seen as fulfilling this representative function.

Indian Education Act, 1835

The debate between education in English or in classical Indian languages (Sanskrit, Arabic, etc.) was put to rest with the passage of the Indian Education Act in 1835. It laid the foundations of a colonial cultural policy ensuring British ideological hegemony in the field of education. The Act proposed the use of English in science and literary education for the Indian elite on the one hand, language studies including oriental languages such as Sanskrit, Persian, or Arabic on the other. English, nevertheless, enjoyed a special status. Indian cultural and literary historians

(Gauri Vishwanathan, 2015; Tejaswini Niranjana, 1995; Singh, Jyotsna, 2003 et al.) have persuasively argued that both Anglicists and later the English Orientalists believed that cultural values moved *downward* from a position of power. The assumption was that the humanist, moral and cultural benefits of English education would trickle down to the lower sections of the society and an eventual transformation of Indian society may be possible. Thus, in introducing English literature to the elite Indians—or in allowing them access to Calcutta theaters—the colonial rulers were not being egalitarian, but rather engaging in “hegemonic activity” securing consent through intellectual and moral manipulation (Singh, 2003, 103). The drive to better educate the Indian elite also came back to economic motivations. The rationale was that if the indigenous people were exposed to English language and literature, they would become more “advanced” and desirous of the “ingenious” products of Britain. The teaching and learning of English became synonymous with higher cultural and social status and pragmatic value. This is amply demonstrated in the Minute of T.B. Macaulay in 1835, which states in no unclear terms the preference for English as a medium of instruction over classical Arabic or Sanskrit:

... we ought to employ them in teaching what is best worth knowing, that English is better worth knowing than Sanscrit or Arabic, that the natives are desirous to be taught English, and are not desirous to be taught Sanscrit or Arabic, that neither as the languages of law nor as the languages of religion have the Sanscrit and Arabic any peculiar claim to our encouragement, that it is possible to make natives of this country thoroughly good English scholars, and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed (Macaulay quoted in Martin Moir, Lynn Zastoupil, 1999, 171)

To take forward the proposed educational system with its underlying ideological assumptions of the superiority and usefulness of English language education to the administration of the colonial state, he proposed stopping the printing of Arabic and Sanscrit books, abolishing the Mudrassa and the Sanscrit College at Calcutta. Additionally, he recommended retaining the Sanscrit College at Bonares as the great seat of Brahminical learning and the Mahometan College at Delhi for Arabic as centres for Eastern language learning. The rationale for this separation between specialised language centres and the imposition of English as the medium of instruction served the pragmatic purpose of creating enough resources at hand to fund English language education at Hindoo College at Calcutta, Fort William, and Agra schools. This was supported by the assertion that vernacular languages and culture contained neither literary or scientific information, were poor and rude, needed refinement, and borrowed terms of science from the Western nomenclature in order to be made fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the natives. Macaulay's denunciation of Indian cultural achievements ``was not an aberration or a result of ignorance, it reflected the concern of the colonial state to promote cultural hegemonization'' (Panikkar, 2003, 9)

With the passing of the Act, the import of British literature into India, with Shakespeare as the primary signifier and literary model par excellence, along with others such as Hume, Milton, and Gibbon, created the foundation for a British literary liberal education. It served, simultaneously, to position English language as the natural conduit of knowledge of authentic Indian culture. The canonisation and classicisation of Sanskrit literary tradition through English translations of classical Indian texts had been undertaken by British scholars from the eighteenth century onwards. These translated texts and scholarly commentaries on them constructed India's past as a glorious period that should serve as a legacy and cultural-civilisational model for the rising

Indian intelligentsia. The process of ascribing to Sanskrit and Arabic texts the status of classics, while denigrating contemporary cultural forms reconfirmed the logics of the colonial civilising mission that sought to “purify” indigenous culture. Postcolonial literary scholars see translation as a means to selectively represent the Indian past in ways that benefitted the colonial narrative of cultural superiority. Several theatre historians (Arnab Banerji, 2020; Dharwadker, 2009; Singh, Jyotsna G., 2003; Singh, Jyotsna G. and David D. Kim, 2017) confirm that by the mid-nineteenth century, the English-educated Bengali intelligentsia, the landowning and profiteering trading classes, had been exposed to English theatrical ideas and conventions.

Public theatre became an important cultural form that intervened in the ideological formation of the British Empire in the nineteenth century, particularly through productions of Shakespearean plays. These productions echoed the aims of the ‘civilising mission’ of colonial rule affected through English liberal education, the canonisation of English classical texts, and the naturalisation of English modes of play production. While the performance of Shakespearean works happened as part of a political strategy that aimed at exporting and disseminating English culture in the nineteenth century, simultaneous indigenous reproductions of Shakespearean plays in vernacular languages emerged as repetition/mimicry and difference intersecting, as they did, with contingencies of language, native culture and race (Singh, 1989, 447). Through translation, adaptation and reinvention of materials transmitted by dominant culture, Shakespearean plays became a site of an on-going cultural struggle that resulted in hybrid theatrical expressions, most notably the ‘Company natak’, evolving into new and distinct forms such as the Parsi theatre. This “strain of hybridity”, as Jyotsna Singh (1996, 12) rightly calls it, has been crucial to not only the development of literature and literary studies in postcolonial India but also a central

point of contestation in the formation of India's colonial and later, national identity and the policy interventions of its postcolonial cultural institutions.

The Evolution of Print Capitalism

Benedict Anderson suggests that commercial printing was a catalyst in the emergence of nationalism in Europe (1991, 33-46). The development of the vernacular press, particularly the newspaper, enabled a broad comradeship amongst its readers, creating an extended social world beyond the individual and thereby instilling a sense of belonging foundational to nationalism and nationalist discourse (ibid). In colonial Bengal the commercial press developed towards the end of the eighteenth century at the initiative of the East India Company to facilitate trade and consolidate the empire. Newspaper reviews of performances, advertisements, and announcements for theatre shows of the period are important historical evidence that scholars have used to identify and understand the proliferation of theatre activity, the appraisal of new innovations on the stage, and the popularity of actors and actresses. The first English language newspaper, *Hicky's Bengal Gazette* or the *Original Calcutta General Advertiser* (1780) carried information about theatre shows and reviews of performances regularly. Hemendra Nath Das Gupta's (2009) extensive archival research uses several theatre reviews from *Hicky's Gazette*, *The Calcutta Gazette* (1787), *The Bengal Hurkura*, *Asiatic Journal*, and other periodicals to reflect on the burgeoning theatrical activity in the city in the nineteenth century (175-306). Beginning with weeklies and then dailies published by British residents in India, Indian language newspapers soon emerged. *Samachar Darpan* (1818), published in Bengali, was the first, followed by the *Bengal Gazetti* in the same year. *Bombay Samachar* (1822) was the first Gujarati language newspaper published from Bombay, and the first Hindi newspaper, *Samachar Sudha Varshan*, began in 1854. Soon

after, newspapers and magazines in other Indian languages like Marathi, Tamil, Malayalam, Urdu, Telugu, and many other vernaculars were published. While the first printed books in Bengali had already been produced at the end of the eighteenth century, followed by books in Sanskrit including dictionaries and books on rules of Sanskrit grammar, an entire institutional network of printing presses, publishing houses, newspaper, magazines and literary societies developed around the mid-nineteenth century, as the bilingual intelligentsia shaped a new modern standardised language representing a modern society (Chatterjee, 1993, 7). It was the assertion of a nationalist aspiration, a cultural project to provide their mother tongue with the necessary linguistic equipment to enable it to become an adequate language for a modern culture (ibid).

This history of the evolution of the vernacular press in the first half of the nineteenth century is significant not only for the way in which modern Indian literary culture developed but also for how mutually reinforcing print and theatrical cultures became. The history of the vernacular press intertwines with the growth of theatre activity in the urban centres. Press records attest to a parallel growth of the professional theatre, of which regular theatre-going, reviewing, and theatre criticism became a crucial part. The formation of public opinion and cultivating of sophisticated taste in theatre enabled by the growing institution of print culture created the modern or “bourgeois” public sphere. Nineteenth century theatre activity catered to public taste, actively defining it through devising standards of theatrical excellence, often expressed in weekly and daily reportage. In this process, we see the historical unfolding of a public sphere of debate, and interest in and attendance to the public theatre developing at the time, which was mediated and sustained by print culture. The explosion in the printing economy after the revolt of 1857 in the form of books, pamphlets, newsletters, and journals reflected the growing dissatisfaction with

the colonial regimes of power. They were instrumental in spreading nationalist ideas of social reformers, politicians, and resistance groups, thereby gaining the attention of the British government.

The symbiotic relationship of the vernacular press with the freedom movement led to the passing of the Vernacular Press Act of 1878, bringing the press under strict control of the state. Interestingly, the remarks of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, minuted on 13th June 1876 while presenting the Dramatic Performances Bill echo the perceived dangers of ‘published’ (read written) representations (for which a law was already in place) while stressing the need for a law on ‘performed’ representations on the stage, to be enacted. - DPA (quoted in Nandi Bhatia)

Vernacular Press Act, 1878

An interesting intersection of the colonial cultural policy objectives can be seen to have been achieved in the passing of the Vernacular Press Act of 1878 that disallowed any seditious writings in the native press. The act empowered the local British officials to demand bonds and deposits from publishers and printers, and confiscate money and machinery, in case of publishing any seditious material. The new law gave the government the control over debate and public opinion expressed in any language different from English. The strict distinctions between English language and vernacular press also meant strict distinctions between the British society and Indians on the one hand, and on the other the English-educated elite Indians, who were naturally intolerant of “sedition”, and the rest of the native population. This was followed by the Press Act of 1910 that enabled the government to seize and destroy all publications including printed plays, irrespective of language, that carried any traces of nationalist propaganda or criticism of government policies. But in the moment of enacting censorship over vernacular press, the colonial

state used language as the underlying principle governing colonial difference, thereby delegitimizing the opinion of those outside the institutional structures of English education. Those expressing disagreement in their own language were condemned for their sense of judgement, lack of rationality, and reason in public discourse. The same rationale of language was simultaneously used to relegate to the English language press and its authors and readers a “proper sense of responsibility and a general desire to discuss public events in a moderate and reasonable spirit” (British official quoted in Chatterjee 25). Through the divisions of language and class, the right of freedom of speech had been decided in the favour of the latter, proscribing to the rest not only public opinion and active public participation but also the right to be equal citizens. The various press legislations from 1878 onwards demonstrate a growing use of the printed word to disseminate nationalist and anti-colonial ideas of which written plays and performance were an important source.

Urban Theatre: Encounters with Modernity & Nationalism

Intensification of the anti-colonial movement, the ideas and ideologies of which permeated into the theatre, created a nationalistic zeal that determined both the content and form of urban theatre. So far, theatre activity had only been seen either as popular entertainment indulged in by the illiterate masses or the pursuit of the Indian bilingual upper-caste bourgeois imitating modern European culture. But the growing anti-colonial aspiration of the mid-nineteenth century produced theatre as a cultural institution with a significant role in mobilising collective political action and resistance. On the one hand, the traditional forms like *Dasavatara* or *Yaksagana*, *bharud*, *tamasha*, *lalit*, etc., contributed to the richness of fare along with the Sanskrit forms like *Prahasana* or *Bhana*. On the other hand, the popular Parsi theatre borrowed from Marathi and

Gujarati theatre for its rich and complex narratives and Victorian theatre for production style and spectacularization. Numerous itinerant companies used scenery, dialogue, and music to critique colonial rule, policies, and exploitative practices. While the popular and folk theatres, both religious, mythological as well as secular entertainment forms, had always constituted an important part of the social and cultural life in India from pre-colonial times, there was a discernible politicisation of the stage brought about by formal experimentation from 1870s onwards. Nandi Bhatia notes that the resistance to and reassessment of ruling ideologies by colonial and post-colonial theatre used multiple methods of engagement ranging from mythology, folk forms, reenactment and revival of oppressed histories and hybrid Anglo-Europeans productions (2010, 2). This theatre became an active mode of asserting a distinct national identity, incorporating both modernity and Indian-ness in its form and content.

The widespread popularity of theatre as an arena for anti-colonial cultural resistance also derived from the fact that it was tied closely to indigenous cultural traditions, believed to not translate fully into European forms of expression. Nandi Bhatia proposes that material realities of lack of literacy and a heterogeneous context of language both make theatre in most colonised constituencies like India even more relevant (ibid., 4). The imagining of national communities through print culture, as the classical European theories of nationalism profess, does not fully explain the historical workings of nationalism in non-literate cultures that are dominated by oral and performance traditions. So while printing enabled new forms of literary culture and nationalist consciousness, theatrical traditions that had been practiced for long and by many, became a mode of imagining a nation into being by creating and sustaining communities through production, circulation, and consumption of ideas in a variety of languages (5) The response of the

colonial state to the popularity of theatre, its widespread practice, and performative potential is evident in the increasing surveillance and censorship that it elicited in the late nineteenth century. Government control over and censorship of the stage are central to the intensification of the colonial discourse on drama towards the end of the nineteenth century. Much of the anxiety of the colonial officials over the ability of drama to influence public opinion stems from the performative, linguistic, and spatial aspects of theatre that the government either had no access to or no control over.

Dramatic Performances Act, 1879

The Dramatic Performances Act was the first direct and expressly repressive intervention made by the colonial state to regulate and control dramatic activity. It derived, at least partly, from the colonial state's inability to understand the local customs, the language of performance, and the symbolic critique of and resistance to the colonial rule that indigenous theatre had started to mount post the events of 1857. The Statement of Objects and Reasons accompanying the Dramatic Performances Act, 1876 ascribes the necessity of the bill to the performance of a “recent scurrilous Bengali drama” in Calcutta, to prevent which the existing legal provisions were found to be insufficient (qtd in Bhatia, 2004, 123). Deenbandhu Mitra's *Nil Darpan*, a protest play based on the exploitative conditions of work of the indigo plantation labourers in Bengal written in 1858-59 and published in 1860, came to be seen as a landmark in the history of anti-colonial theatre in India. *Nil Darpan*'s performance and its popularity marks a turning point in understanding of the communicative power of theatre in the anti-colonial struggle and forms the larger cultural and political context, if not the immediate motivation for the passing of the DPA. It was staged at Girish Ghosh's National Theatre in Calcutta in 1871, inspiring many other anti-

colonial 'Darpan' plays, beginning an entire oeuvre that used the 'darpan' or mirror motif to 'reflect' and expose the colonial administration, its exploitative infrastructure, and the colluding landowning elites. The provisions of the DPA, enacted in 1876, enabled strict scrutiny of theatrical activity and prohibited dramatic performances that were considered carrying scandalous, seditious, defamatory or obscene content on stage. Play scripts were required to be submitted for examination with the police and any objectionable sections were censored. The theatre manager was required to visit the police commissioner's office before the aforesaid performance and regular police reporting was done to ensure that the contents of the drama remained permissible in all future performances. A record of all scrutinised plays was maintained by the local authorities and licenses were to be obtained for performances in areas where the local government decided to enact the law. Any disobedience of the local administration's orders was punishable with imprisonment or fine or both.

However, the Act referred only to performances held in a 'public place' or any building or enclosure to which the public was admitted to witness a performance on payment of money. Private entertainment and religious observances, including *Jatra* performances, were out of the purview of law. So while the purpose was to ban politically motivated theatre activity, it was assumed that such activity belonged to the English-educated middle class who had patronised and professionalised the institution of public theatre. This newly emergent class, that had benefited from the Oriental policies of English language and Western-centred education, had become extremely vocal about British misrule and injustice. The DPA and all other restrictive state policies were directed not against the theatrical expression of all natives but specifically towards the ris-

ing generation of educated intellectuals for whom the public theatre had become an important site for the expression of its unique nationalist identity.

Recent scholarship on political theatre also refrains from ascribing a singularly anti-imperialist position to the plays. In examining the microhistory of the DPA (1876), these studies point to complex interconnections between law, drama, and censorship that foreground, not a linear or unitary but a fraught history of colonial struggles in nineteenth century India (Bhatia, 2010; Sharmistha Saha, 2018; Sudipto Chatterjee, 2007). Despite the uncertainty about the manner and potency of dissent reflected in the play, it nevertheless attracted the attention of the press, the nationalist bourgeois as well as the colonial administration to the medium of drama itself. Notwithstanding the critique and the uncertainty of determining whether these early protest plays embodied sufficient nationalist discontentment, it is important to underscore their significance in popularising the anti-imperialist agenda.

Ashish Rajyadhyaksha clarifies that the issue with popular forms of entertainment including theatre of the late nineteenth century was “less a matter of subversive or inflammable content and more its mass duplication that bothered the colonial censor” (2016, 71). The case of *Nil Darpan* exemplifies the importance associated with translation, publication, and most crucially, circulation of critical, anti-colonial ideas through drama. The detailed analysis of the court proceedings on *Nil Darpan* and the associated political controversy in historiographical studies suggest that it was not the political or the seemingly “provocative content” of the play that led to its censoring (Partha Chatterjee, 1993; Ranajit Guha, 1974; Sudipto Chatterjee, 2007; and Nandi Bhatia, 2004). Rather, it was the publishing of the English translation of the play under government sanction, at its own cost and its circulation to the Indian Press for publication, that evoked

the indigo planter's displeasure. The *raison d'être* for censoring the play was therefore the conflicting inner dynamics of colonial power and the relationship between the colonial interests of dominant groups. The image of the exploitative and unfair European had become only more real and powerful through the popularity of *Nil Darpan*. The course-correction and sanitising of the European image was crucial to the continued agendas of the colonial enterprise, which could be jeopardised if the state became too offensive either towards the European planters or the elite Indian intelligentsia recently radicalised by the growing nationalistic fervour. The practical resolution to these undying tensions was found in British officials' conceding that the state-sponsored translation, publishing, and circulation of the play labelled against the powerful indigo planters. The exploitative practices of the indigo trade were financially profitable to the British government that could not risk a settler's revolt.

Interestingly, the colonial administration considered provocative nationalist ideas as being vehicled only through the urban theatre, rather than the popular, folk or indigenous forms of theatre consumed by the large mass of audiences. It was this theatre that was brought under the legal and penal order of the state in 1876. Popular indigenous forms were considered lacking political radicalism, far below contemporary theatrical standards, and were condemned for being lowly, debased, and immoral, a view that the elite and the emerging middle class Indians accepted and propagated. Sumanta Banerjee notes that in Bengal the distaste for folk and indigenous traditions paralleled the rise of the Bengali *bhadralok* (1989, 141). The reformist Hindu movements like the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal and Arya Samaj in north India, concurrently, deployed a moral and patriarchal lens to critique folk forms, their modes of entertainment through singing and dancing especially by women, thereby pushing these forms outside the cultural imagination

of the middle class towards further marginalisation. It is the context of the colonial state's seemingly successful domination and hegemony over elite and middle class cultural and social life, along with cultural denigration and marginalisation of the indigenous folk and popular traditions that the effect and politics of censorship needs to be examined.

While the stated rationale for these newer modes of control were considerations of morality and obscenity in the interest of public order and safeguarding the natives against moral and cultural corruption, in reality the purpose was to control a growing and increasingly professionalising theatre activity. Modern urban theatre's newfound bearings—the written script, actors, playhouses, and paying audiences had become increasingly suspect from the point of view of the colonial administration and therefore made legally culpable in the event of such a performance. The legal prohibitions of the DPA foreground theatre's innate potential to mobilise, perform, and affect subversive political ideas that were not possible to be contained anymore through the existing legal provisions that had been the instruments of surveillance and censorship of popular theatre so far. Most crucially, they reflect the consolidation of an “oppositional current in the realm of theatre” and the resulting apprehensiveness of the colonial authority towards theatre (Bhatia, 2004, 38). As the colonial administrators took stock of the potential dangers of the public stage, newer techniques and methods that were beyond the reach of the censoring authorities were devised. Nandi Bhatia forges a connection between theatrical censorship and the rise of mythological drama and the use of Shakespearean texts as a strategy for anti-colonial protest (ibid., 9).

The DPA became the threshold of explicit state actions in the cultural domain. In the process, it propelled an increasingly repressive colonial state apparatus antithetical to the earlier

cultural policy of sympathetic Orientalism. This was an increasingly aggressive and reactionary state that feared theatrical representation and found its impact significant enough to bring it into its legal and administrative ambit. The colonial state's policy of control and censorship, while restricting theatrical activity of one kind, also enabled greater theatrical output, necessitating newer theatrical forms with an underlying political sensibility.

In conclusion, colonial state policy was not limited to practices and social institutions such as governance, state, law, science, and technology, those aspects of national life where Western models were considered superior and were considered worthy of being studied carefully and replicated. As this chapter demonstrates, in the course of the nineteenth century, the domains of language, education, press, and theatre, domains that Partha Chatterjee calls the "inner domain of national life", became the cultural modalities through which the project of Orientalism was carried out through progressively explicit colonial policies (1993, 6-10). The evolution of modern theatre coincided with significant social and political changes—on the one hand, the increasingly aware nationalist ethos and a fast coalescing anti-colonial movement, and, on the other, a reciprocally and increasingly restrictive colonial state machinery. It also became an arena where nationalism asserted its sovereign power and began its ideological project of creating a modern aesthetic form. Modern urban theatre was a conglomerate of embodied and performative responses to the political, cultural, and social crises generated by the colonial encounter in the nineteenth century. It eventually transformed into a marker of a unique cultural identity marked by colonial ambivalence. The colonial state sought to repudiate these claims through its progressively repressive legal, and administrative apparatus as theatre fashioned a national, modern and non-Western consciousness. There are continuities between the colonial and national state in

their understanding of theatre and its potential to imagine and re-imagine alternative political possibilities. The post-independence cultural bodies, primarily the Sangeet Natak Akademi, pursued the agenda of institutionalising theatre and using it to further its aims of nation-building that aimed at creating a cultured citizenry schooled in and appreciative of new forms of art like modern theatre.

Chapter 3

Theatre, State and Nation-building: Introduction to the Foundations of Sangeet Natak

Akademi

The chapter foregrounds the historical, political, cultural, and administrative contexts that frame the postcolonial Indian state's early interventions, governance, and patronage of the performing arts. These contexts have influenced its institutional mandate and modes of intervention, determining the direction that performing arts, specifically, theatre, took in the following decades. The setting up of the umbrella organisation, Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA), in 1953 was a definite move towards bringing culture within the state's power to regulate, legislate, and control the field, while at the same time making significant departures with regard to the relationship of the state to the arts. It was the most prominent mediation in theatre and performance in postcolonial India. The formation and early policies of SNA are not only tied to the historical development of federalism in India but also coincide with the restructuring and reorganisation of states on a linguistic basis. The conjoined legacies of colonialism and nationalism fed into building a nation whose identity and future would be self-defined and modern. Seen together, these developments determined the central role of the state in public affairs and constituted its policy for culture. A new cultural project had been underway since the late nineteenth century that placed the arts as an important part of the nationalist narrative, invoking questions of modernity and tradition, negotiating cultural diversity and difference, particularly in their representation in the performing arts. In the process, the arts themselves were repositioned as a material practice and a site through which a process of retrieving and redefining tradition and heritage would be

initiated as the authentic inheritance of the nation in a changed political context. The state established itself as the sole authority over the cultural terrain, annulling all previous and any other modes of governmental, social, or cultural organisation. The changed political context over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had already expunged older systems of institutional patronage to the arts, leaving them as an arena for the state to establish its dominance. Launched by an increasingly powerful central authority in a largely asymmetrical federal state and an increased misuse of constitutional provisions for centralization of powers, these processes created power asymmetries that were both mirrored in and intended to be mitigated by the policies of cultural institutions. While economic and social agendas of development governed the state's approach to nation-building, it was through culture that the singular and unified nation had to be imagined into existence. In this, the role ascribed to theatre was central towards asserting the cultural unity of a newly formed nation whose integrity was being contested as it was being shaped.

I focus on the moves made by the state in the realm of culture in the first decade since independence, especially the period from 1953-1960, a period that saw the deployment of modalities of state power through institutions. The paradigm of institution-building in newly independent India sought to place culture as the kernel of democratic policies, to give shape to a “national culture” and to institutionalize it, as Geeta Kapur points out, “precisely to carry out the overall mandate of modernization.” (2000, 202). The beginnings of a policy framework in performing arts can be traced back to the setting up of central cultural institutions, particularly SNA (established in 1953) and the allied political and administrative processes that brought culture into the ambit of state control, becoming part of the “new framework of institutions that embodied the

spirit of progress, or, its synonym, modernity” (Chatterjee, 2010, 53) The very inclusion of culture within the planning process, especially through the objectives and projections in the Five-Year Plans, the main planning instrument of the state, constituted culture as an object of state policy. Existing scholarship on the policy and governance of the arts sees these early moves of the state as laying crucial emphasis on ‘institutionalization of culture’ (Anita Cherian, 2009; Rustom Bharucha, 1992; Vasudha Dalmia, 2012), i.e., the actual implementation of a new cultural project through the creation of an umbrella organisation, the SNA, its practices and policies of setting new aesthetic categories, standards, and a canon for the appraisal of the arts and its performative practices. The primary aim of the Akademi mentioned in its 1953-58 report was to ensure the “efflorescence of Indian art tradition at the highest standard of artistic excellence” (4). What followed was an extensive process of instituting awards, negotiating with existing and new cultural institutions through processes of affiliation, recognition, and financial aid, with emphasis on particular initiatives specifically recording, documentation, and preservation of the arts that actively grounded its position with regard to tradition and modernity in performing arts. Central training institutions for theatre, dance, and music and regional akademies were instituted to create a unified and hierarchical structure for the arts, “fostering kinship with the parent body”, i.e., the central SNA (SNA, 1958, 57). These early moves by the state drew their urgency and importance primarily from the value ascribed to the arts to define the cultural identity of the nation.

Institutionalisation of Culture

In the years leading to Indian independence, there was a consciousness of an active sphere of arts that had been growing. It was widely believed that the responsibility for patronage, preservation, and development of the arts would lie with the state and the governmental agencies

explicitly established for the purpose. It was with this intent that in 1945 the Asiatic Society of Bengal proposed to the Government of India to create a National Cultural Trust dedicated to the task of supporting cultural activity. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the first Minister of Education, Government of independent India, made a policy statement in Parliament in March 1948 in which he announced the setting up a National Cultural Trust comprising the three Akademies—one for the Performing Arts (Dance, Drama, and Music), another as Academy of Letters, and an Academy of Art and Architecture—to “serve to focus the artistic and cultural life of the nation in one common centre” (Constituent Assembly of India, 1948, 1958). This proposal underwent discussion at the Conference on Art held in Kolkata in 1949, and the two subsequent conferences held in New Delhi in 1950, on ‘Letters’, and ‘Dance, Drama, and Music’. After discussions over the ‘implications’ of the proposal by the Central Advisory Board to Education, it was finally resolved to create these academies as autonomous bodies, funded directly by the Government of India. The Union Ministry of Education adopted a resolution in May 1951, resolving to constitute a national academy of dance, drama, and music to be called Sangeet Natak Akademi, which was the first of these entities to be established. Headed by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Sangeet Natak Akademi was inaugurated in the nation’s capital city, New Delhi, by the then President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad, on 28 January 1953 as a statutory body formed by an Act of Parliament¹³. Interestingly, once the national government of independent India had been established, the early recommendation of setting up a national cultural trust to house the academies was no longer deemed necessary. A common feature in the history of cultural policy-making in post-

¹³ The Akademi’s charter of functions, contained in the 1952 resolution, was expanded along the original lines in 1961, when Sangeet Natak Akademi was reconstituted by the government as a society and registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860 (as amended in 1957). These functions are set down in the Akademi’s Memorandum of Association, adopted at its registration as a society on 11 September 1961.

colonial contexts has been the creation of a national culture through central government-sponsored institutions set up in the capital city of the new nation. The constitution of the Akademi does point to the array of opinions of the members over the location of its headquarters in Delhi, as opposed to Madras or Calcutta. Within its charter this finds a mention in the possibility of relocating the Akademi central office from Delhi to "any other place with the consent of three-fourths of the members of the akademi", which, however, never happened (SNA, 1958, 5).

Azad's vision of the state as the natural guardian of culture and its role in the functioning of the academies is somewhat contrary to the urgent need and significance of culture in building a new nation and the unprecedented activity and interest of the state in cultural affairs. He posits that,

The government's function in this process is mainly that of a curtain-raiser. Someone has to set up the academies, and the government has decided to do so. Once they are set up, the government will refrain from exercising any control and leave the academies to perform their functions as autonomous institutions (1991, 160).

Despite the top-down fashion of their creation, Azad emphasises the functional autonomy of the academies and side steps from exercising any governmental control over them. But elsewhere, he articulates the relationship between the people and the arts:

In a democratic regime, the arts can derive their sustenance only from the people, and the State as the organized manifestation of the people's will, must, therefore, undertake its maintenance and development as one of its first responsibilities (SNA, 1958, 2)

The role of ‘culture and arts’ was emphasized as the assertion of people’s self-expression. As Partha Chatterjee reminds us, the post-colonial state’s claim to legitimacy as the ‘single will and consciousness of the nation’ and its people was rationalised and determined in its acts of planning, seen as a domain outside of politics, but used as an active instrument of politics (1993, 202-5). In the cultural realm, perceived to exist outside of the political sphere, the state arrogated to itself a unique power and authority through creating cultural institutions deployed in the task of nation-building. For Maulana Azad, no education at any level was complete without art and culture that were meant to satisfy cultural needs of the people and deemed essential for the healthy growth of the nation. In his opening address at the inauguration of SNA, he clarifies the regulatory interventions that the Akademi would stage in its early years, especially in the domain of traditional cultural practice. He asserts that,

... Nowhere is it truer than in the field of art that to sustain means to create. Traditions cannot be preserved but can only be created afresh. It will be the aim of this Akademi to preserve our traditions by offering them an institutional form... (1991, 15)

SNA and its network of institutions were created as part of the bureaucratic process of planning and inducted into the state’s sphere of action through setting up a vision for a short and long-term future and allocating resources for its realisation. Theatre, dance, and music became an important aspect of its understanding of culture, seen not just as the organic expression of a community but rather, as a set of representational practices of social and cultural groups through which the values, histories, and cultural distinctiveness of a people are performed and kept alive. For the elite and emerging middle class, looking at their past was becoming increasingly crucial to shaping their identity as distinct from the colonisers. They became the vanguards of this engagement with

‘tradition’ that the Akademi embodied and spearheaded. The emergence of this new class of citizens, with new sensibility and mentality and their centrality within the cultural project of nationalism in the late nineteenth century converged with the transformations brought within classical traditions of music and dance. This happened not only because a frayed aristocracy with old systems of support for the arts was giving way to new centres of patronage with a consuming middle class clientele, but also because of newer institutions of classical performance and training that were created to inculcate a taste for classical arts among the middle classes. Institutions such as the Gayan Samaj and the Madras Music Academy began championing the cause of writing and teaching music, in the process reinventing the repertoire and relocating it from the exclusive reach of the upper-caste aristocracy to the custodianship of the upper-caste urban middle class. The history of theatre and its institutionalization parallels other performing arts, particularly dance, in these early years after independence.

Representing the nation’s cultural forms of heritage also involved projecting an authentic Indianness through the discourse of tradition. Tapati Guha Thakurta argues, “the spiritual that had been long reified as the unique feature of the Indian national psyche”, vehicle primarily through its art historical heritage, was redefined in modern India through a process that involved “reshaping the entire image of India’s art historical inheritance” (2004, 185). In the fine arts this included a revision of the very status and identity, a shift from decorative to the fine arts, from the archeological to its aesthetic evaluation, and empowering it with a unique aesthetic content (ibid.). In the performing arts, the focus on and reconstituting of classical and folk traditions and inscribing them with meanings and values to emphasise their spiritual, timeless, and exotic aspects was an important aspect of asserting India’s cultural uniqueness. The underlying common

feature between the shifts in aesthetic in fine and the performing arts was the invention of “a sharp East-West dichotomy”, the opposition between the spiritual and the objective, idealism and realism. If in fine arts the defining features of Indian heritage were the ‘spiritual’ and ‘transcendental’, it was the ‘traditional’ - the ‘Natyashastric’ and the ‘folkish’ that would supplant a unique Indian veneer in the performing arts, supplying “the code that could reduce and compress its complex history around a common sense” (ibid., 186) These traditions were sought to be inserted into an invented historical-mythical past that could be traced back to antiquity, authenticating the richness of Indian traditions by now lost due to a host of historical circumstances. Arts, for the nation-state, came to be seen as a cultural ‘resource’, valuable for bringing back India’s glorious cultural past while accommodating difference and diversity for the present, thus integrating the varied parts of the nation into an indivisible and all-consuming entity. For this, artistic practice was to be regulated, systematised, and wherever required, reinvented.

The akademies derived their nomenclature and functions from the art and language academies of England and France that were secular schools of learning or training focussed on specialized art disciplines and streams of scientific knowledge. In medieval Europe, these ‘learned societies’ emerged in opposition to the religiously affiliated and craft-focused ‘guilds’ into more art focussed schools (Bharucha, 1992, 1668). They later came to be associated with academism, drawing criticism from practitioners and proponents of more creative expressions within art (ibid). The etymology and evolution of the term ‘academy’ suggests its early association (from mid-fifteenth century *Achademie*, ‘the classical Academy’) with Plato’s public garden where he taught his school of Greek philosophy to its 1540s reference to a place of learning, a school or training place for arts and sciences or higher learning, including the eighteenth century connota-

tion of public schools run by ‘dissenters’, in Scotland and Northern Ireland (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). As the term ‘academy’ came to be used for state-sponsored cultural institutions for art, music, theatre, dance, and literature in post-colonial India, it was definitely associated with the cultivation and promotion of artistic or scientific skill for professionals. In this context, the importation of the term signals a desire for patterning art and performance culture on the European model of art training and practice. Interestingly, the radical and alternative roots of the European tradition were excluded from the cultural institutions that were created in India. Additionally, the word ‘academy’ was indigenised to ‘Akademi’, adding the Sanskrit compound ‘Sangeet-Natak’ to create an indigenous name for a modern cultural institution, embodying in name, spirit, and purpose a uniquely Indian modernity, steered by the state-sponsored training and practice of indigenous traditions of performance.

It is relevant here to quote at some length the multifarious roles of the academies envisioned by Maulana Azad in a speech delivered at the inaugural address of Sahitya Kala Akademi (National Academy of Letters, in New Delhi in 1954), a year after the institution of SNA. He clarifies the domains of art and cultural practice that the state would bring into its sphere of intervention. Since SNA was the first of the three akademies to be set up and begin its operations, the definitional connotations of the word ‘academy’ seem most poignant to its early mediations. He asks,

What do we mean by an academy? Is it a school? The answer is ‘No.’ Is it a research institute ? Again the answer is ‘No’. Is it then an association of writers and actors ? Still the answer is in the negative. If however, it be asked whether it possesses the attributes of

all of them, the answer must be an emphatic ‘Yes’. By calling it an academy, we refer to all these facets and signify that it is at the same time a school or an institute and an association. If we were to call it a school or an institute or association only, the full significance of what we intend would remain unexpressed. An academic is, in fact, something more than any or all of them (1991, 161)

Two of SNA’s most significant interventions in its first decade of existence¹⁴ are prefaced in Azad’s speech—the institution of SNA awards, and a system of recognition and affiliation for new and existing institutions. In seeing the akademies as associations of artists, actors, and writers, Azad suggests the creation of a cultural bureaucracy that would champion the progress of each of their fields, setting standards of excellence, constituting and regularly expanding its canon of performance practice. Inventing an epistemological framework for itself, the Akademies saw themselves as steering a modern discourse of training and practice in music, dance, and theatre through setting up training institutions and standardising their methods, documenting and recording existing forms of theatre and dance, particularly the folk, and displaying the nation’s traditional ‘resource’ through the festivals it organised. The social developmental and ideological force of culture was apprehended through the administrative and pedagogical.

Patronage

¹⁴ Among the listed functions of the SNA are the following – to coordinate the activities of regional or state akademies; to promote research and establish a library and a museum; to cooperate with similar akademies and institutions for the enrichment of Indian culture; to encourage exchange of ideas and techniques between different regions in dance, drama and music; to encourage the establishment of theatre centres on the basis of regional languages and cooperation; to provide training in theatre and stage craft; to encourage and assist productions of new plays through prizes and other distinctions; to publish literature on Indian dance, drama, and music, including reference works, such as illustrated dictionaries and handbooks; to revive folk dance and music; to sponsor regional festivals in the arts; to purchase, land, acquire properties, dispose of them; and to do all things required to further the objects of the Akademi (SNA, Compiled Report 1953-58, ‘Powers and Functions’, 5-6).

The immediate context and the explicitly stated rationale for the government to step in and assuage the arts was the paramount crisis of patronage. The shifts in the traditional structures of patronage that had begun in the nineteenth century due to larger political and economic changes had by now affected a definite blow to all familiar systems that supported the arts, transposing earlier colonial modes of patronage and government organisation as well as dismantling the social and political landscape of the princely states. As the patrons turned from connoisseurs of art to employers of artists following Western patterns of patronage for art from early eighteenth century onwards, the *gunijankhana*¹⁵, or the Department of Performing Artists in Jaipur evolved into increasingly bureaucratised setups (Joan Erdman, 1983, 265). With the dismantling of the princely states, the patronage to traditional arts, classical and folk, through the gurukul system and donations of other wealthy benefactors, had visibly declined. On the other hand, the shift of power from the colonial state to the sovereign nation-state, created a crisis for those artistic practices that had been supported and institutionalised by the former modern visual art practices—documentation, archiving, and display of archeological objects and artefacts, museum practices, and architecture. What also shifted were the traditional locations of cultural patronage from the temple, the court, and the salons, that had been the traditional context and condition for the existence of cultural practices so far to more secular, accessible, and commercial sites of performance like the concert halls. But, as dance scholar Avanthi Medhuri notes, this shift from the ritual to the secular did not ‘secularise’ music and dance, forms for which the ‘spiritual’ continued to be a source of authentic tradition associated inevitably with ancient Hindu texts, etching the spiritual deeper into the experience of performance (2008, 143-45). But for the state, the

¹⁵ *Gunijankhana*, broadly translates as ‘the house of the cultured’, refers to royal departments of state-employed artists performing regularly on official occasions

question of who or what would take the place of the older systems of patronage, both colonial and indigenous, was an urgent one. Studies of princely patronage of the arts argue that the social, religious, and courtly art, music, dance, and ritual performed complex functions of asserting royal legitimacy and authority while creating institutional structures for the performing arts across divisions of religion, culture, and language¹⁶. Even though their role as cultural innovators¹⁷ has not been studied in detail, the patronage of princely states was a key factor in the “transition of patronage from the personal, intimate world of the royal court, to the bureaucratic, populist organisation of post-colonial India and its cultural institutions” (Ramusack, 2004, 157). The newly independent state established a “bureaucratic institutional infrastructure that assumed responsibility from the princes and distributed public resources to promote indigenous art forms” (ibid., 168). As stated earlier, the burgeoning bourgeois, the urban middle-classes, now drawn to the traditional arts through the democratisation of training and modern secular contexts of performance, which was earlier accessible exclusively to the coterie of upper caste and brahminical orders, created and reinforced a new cultural identity for itself. It was this class for and by whom

¹⁶ Ramusack contends that Hindu rulers, Delhi Sultans, and Mughals throughout India nurtured musicians, singers, instrumentalists, and dancers, both folk and classical, in order to publicise their claims to absolute authority legitimated by semi-divine status (2004, 147-56). This was a crucial aspect of performing their kingly dharma and *izzat* (honour). B.N.Goswamy argues that, it was through iconography (painting, murals, architecture) that the princely state rulers acknowledged their position as first among equals and as protectors of their subjects, but in their bountiful patronage of painters they also advertised their own legitimacy. The Rajput rulers and their successor princes did not just imitate but blended Mughal, Hindu, and British symbols of authority in architecture and painting (1985, xix–xxiii). The Indian princes had, in the rapidly changing political context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, patronised museums and printed books on cultural sites. They were also instrumental in changing institutional structures for the performance of music and dance, specifically the *gharanas* of Hindustani classical dance and music systems. The state of Mysore had been a significant benefactor for classical dance and music, specifically *Bharatnatyam* and the Maratha-ruled states of Gwalior, Baroda, and Indore had patronised classical and folk musicians. Even smaller states with limited resources, most notably Rampur in the United Provinces, were known to be patrons of classical music. The Maharaja of Banaras became the dominant patron of the public recitation of the *Ramayana* and the dramatic performance of the *Ramlila* that honoured Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu. (Lutgendorf, 1989, 34-61)

¹⁷ The princes established museums, promoted newly emergent, technologically-driven forms like photography, created and sustained a national structure for music and dance festivals. They also provided the transitional stage for mass entertainment including forms of popular theatre.

traditional forms of performance were reframed in a new institutional context, transforming them as national traditions and creating new definitions of aesthetic standards and values. The consolidated report of the first five years of SNA (1953-58) positions its formation as a 'landmark in the cultural history of the country' vital to "the new awakening and cultural resurgence" taking place in the country "under a system of patronage hitherto unknown to the Indian Arts" (SNA, 1958, 1). It is in the larger context of disappearing modes of patronage of 'durbars, courts, and religious bodies' that a case for state intervention in the arts is made (ibid). As Benedict Anderson reminds us, in the context of Southeast Asia, the colonial state used museums and archaeological sites to legitimize its exercise of power and that post-colonial states inherited this practice (2006, 178-79). The notion of heritage, past, and monumental archaeology, increasingly linked to tourism, allowed the state to appear as the guardian of the generalised, as well as the regionally organised local traditions. SNA's early policy moves in theatre, dance, and music manifest a similar concentration on traditions of the past, reinserted into the present and future definitions of Indian performance culture. However, as Peterson and Soneji have argued in the context of South India, music and dance traditions were so intertwined that they must be viewed alongside each other. The project of classification involved several actors other than the nation-state— the performer, the professional musician, as well as the responses to Western, local and popular forms of dance and music. It is not only a national story but also the "regional and the national in layered overlapping configurations" (2008, 25). As Janet O'Shea argues classical traditions were not simply refigured in the interest of nationalism but "emerged as a platform where competing versions of identity could be staged", problematising the relations between the nation and the region and how they were reimagined (2008, 172). SNA's new systems of patronage was affected

through a range of methods that included creating a system of affiliation and recognition for existing cultural institutions, rewarding them with monetary support in the form of grants if they pursued SNA's agenda of collecting, recording, and documenting histories that would authenticate the tradition of regional Indian dance, music, and theatre forms. Awards and discrete categories were devised for forms of performance that had thus far been composite forms combining vocabularies of singing, dance, speech, and acting. Through the coinage of classical and folk categories of performance traditions, more region-specific forms were included in the performing arts canon and brought into the fold of national culture.

Culture in Context: Conditions of Linguistic Reorganisation and Creation of a Federal State

The two significant constitutive conditions that shaped the relationship of arts to the nation and its institutional structures in the first decade of independence were, firstly, the process of reorganisation of states on the basis of language, a process underway since 1950; and secondly, the related distribution of legislative, executive, and judicial cultural powers between the centre and the states. Seen together, these processes redefined the geographical, administrative, and political contours of the nation and its constituent states, defining the federal structure of the nation. I argue that they serve as important contextual markers that animate the early policy assertions of SNA as the cultural parallel to the nation-state's rationalising and integrating acts. The state reorganisation exercise was, on the one hand, meant to dismantle the geographic, cultural, and political boundaries drawn arbitrarily by the colonial state in complete disregard of their historical cultural and linguistic cohesiveness. On the other hand, the realignment and consolidation of caste and class communities within linguistic regions reintegrated them into the nation, thereby

strengthening the ideology of the nation-state¹⁸. It is only after relinquishing the right to self-governance that the linguistic communities gained entry into the nation-state thereby confirming the multicultural and multilingual nature of the Indian ‘nation’¹⁹. Therefore, the reorganisation exercise had not only created newer modes of power and authority—that of the nation-state—but also reconfigured the nation’s social, regional, and linguistic diversities into more uniform and administratively manageable units of state power.

As a modern form of state structure, federalism “supposes two or more subnational entities with their own powers and their own legitimacy over certain areas of policy” marking the boundaries of national and subnational power, and established the extents of autonomy, centralisation, and cultural distinction (Paquette, 2019, 31). Historically, federalism, as a political system made to accommodate cultural differences, provides the institutional setting for cultural policy and administration to develop (ibid., 31-4). The Indian federation, a culturally, linguistically, and religiously diverse formation, is a result of what political scientists understand as devolution²⁰. The states enjoy limited fiscal powers and depend on the centre for financial assistance²¹. Cooperation in national development between the Centre and the States has historically been a condi-

¹⁸ Before the reorganisation, many communities were linguistically and culturally heterogeneous.

¹⁹ It was only after the 1967 (Amended) Languages Act was passed that the position of English was secured for use in parliament and for centre-state communications.

²⁰ ‘Devolution’ refers to the creation of self-governing states from the British empire through processes of imperial decentralisation. Indian political system has often been seen as a case of asymmetrical federalism, or quasi-federalism where states are conferred varying forms and degrees of administrative and legislative and residuary powers, that is, the power to make laws in a field not specified in the Constitution is vested with the Parliament.

²¹ The Union Powers Committee of the Constituent Assembly (CA), in its final report submitted on August 20, 1947 unanimously noted that “it would be injurious to the interest of the country to provide for a weak central authority which would be incapable of ensuring peace, of coordinating vital matter of common concern and of speaking effectively for the whole country in the international sphere.” It concluded that “the soundest framework for our Constitution is the federation with a strong centre” (Constituent Assembly Debates, V, n.d.). This recommendation was accepted by the CA and became the bedrock of Indian federalism that consisted of the Union at the Centre and States at the periphery.

tion for the success of national planning. Anand notes that this cooperation was secured through the greater capacity of the Centre to act as ‘staff’ through providing financial support and for the State governments to act as ‘line agencies’ (R. Singh, 2005, 44). Beyme notes of federal contexts, such as India, that “the constitution or political arrangements create a situation of exception for some subnational members” (qtd. in Paquette, 2019, 23) implying an institutional context of uneven distribution of power between the Centre and the states, where exceptions are routinely made for some subnational governments. The Centre-State relationship with its decisive tilt in favour of the central authority led to concentration of most powers²², particularly financial, in the hands of the Centre, leading to not only economic inequalities but also social and cultural imbalance. This became a characteristic feature of cultural policy of the Indian state and a recurring problem of the Centre's financial outlay for cultural institutions like SNA.

Anita Cherian posits that SNA, in its early attempts, replicated “the state’s centralizing ambitions, striving to incorporate into its purported ‘unity,’ all difference and diversity.” (2009, 33). It can be argued that the political, administrative, and financial centralisation at work in this decade was recompensed by the balancing acts performed by the Akademi through classification, hierarchisation, and codification of regional forms of theatre and dance, thereby rationalising and

²² The institutions that were the main pieces of the planning machinery of the state—Planning Commission (1950) which formulated the Five-Year Plans; the Finance Commission and the National Planning Committee (instituted in 1939) that allocated financial resources; National Development Council (1952); the University Grants Commission (1956) which oversaw higher education; and the All India Radio (1936) that ran the broadcasting network—all these were and are still controlled by the Central government.

mediating in the political process of state reorganisation²³. The deep-seated linguistic-cultural diversity and differences within different linguistic regions had to be negotiated carefully during the early years of state formation²⁴. It is not a coincidence that the formation of national cultural institutions like the SNA (along with Lalit Kala Akademi and Sahitya Akademi) happened at the same time as the political and linguistic reorganisation of the nation. The fundamental premise of the exercise was to inculcate a sense of belonging and identification to the nation and forge a larger political unity through culture despite the emerging narratives of cultural, historical, and linguistic differences. In the cultural discourse of its formative years, SNA assumed and affirmed an integral view of Indian culture, a unitary position that subsumed all differences and contradictions within predetermined and homogenous categories, while remaining unctuous to the idea of difference.

Culture as an Object of Planning

²³ The States Reorganisation Commission (SRC), created in 1953, suggested the reorganisation of twenty-seven states into sixteen states and three union territories. The State Reorganisation Act, 1956 was passed by the Parliament to give effect to the recommendations of the commission. It created fourteen states and six centrally-administered territories, with several other states to be reorganised later on. It is important to remember that the process of linguistic reorganization continued well beyond 1956: the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat were created in 1960; Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh came into existence in 1966; and much of the Northeast was reorganized only in the 1970s. The most recent state to be carved out is Telangana, created in 2014.

²⁴ This was despite the constitutional provision to create new states when necessary to accommodate any legitimate aspiration of the people to have a state of their own; develop their own cultural and social traditions; and recognition of their ethnic or linguistic identity. In the discussion on the integration and creation of culturally and linguistically determined states, it may be important to remember that the other criteria for the creation of states—along religious lines—had been considered to pose a greater threat to a territorial conception of nationhood. Linguistic identities, on the other hand, had been central to most assertions for political sovereignty as had been visible in a number of language-centred identity movements of the period. These movements and their leadership (in various states of South India and also Maharashtra) demanded for the reorganization of states on the basis of linguistic-cultural distinctiveness, economic viability, and geographical unity. The leadership of the linguistic communities became vocal and was emboldened by Congress's acceptance of the linguistic reorganization of its own organization in 1920. Even though the Congress-appointed JVP Committee (1948) initially rejected language as the basis of reorganisation of states, arguing instead for national unity and administrative and economic criteria, it had to concede to the demand for reorganisation of Telugu-speaking areas in the state of Andhra Pradesh in 1953 after violent protests. The State Reorganisation Commission created by the Government of India in 1953 accepted the language as the basis of States reorganisation.

The centrality of the idea of planning, with Nehru as its most ardent proponent²⁵ has been examined as the “inculcation of an ‘all-India’ sensibility that coalesced the subcontinent’s resources”, whether economic, social, or cultural and “placed it at the disposal of the nation–state” (Cherian, 2019, 35). As a modality of institutional power, planning determined the developmental priorities on behalf of the nation and allocated its material resources (Chatterjee, 1993, 201-02). As an exercise in devising state policies, it comprised a body of experts who evaluated alternatives, examined possible outcomes and benefits, and recommended economic choices in a scientific manner. A vital tool of the planning exercise were the Five-year Plans, purposed with the task of assessing the material, capital, and human resources; identifying and prioritising the main developmental tasks; setting up programmes for economic; and social development of the nation and outlining a path for their effective implementation. Sukhamoy Chakravarty notes that planning became a positive instrument of politics for resolving political conflicts in a large and heterogeneous nation like India (1987, 2-3) . Equally, it became an instrument for achieving a larger national synthesis and consensus on all matters of national importance. The First Plan clearly states this:

The success of planning in a democracy depends also on the growth of the spirit of co-operation and the sense of disciplined citizenship among the people... (Planning Commission, 1953, 525)

²⁵ Through his articulations in INC meetings (Lahore Session, 1929 and Karachi Session 1930) on the impending changes in the political and social structure of India through socialist means, Nehru set forth the agenda of nation building. His vision of social welfare, industrialization, equality of education, opportunity, and development was inspired particularly from the Soviet model of industrial and economic development. Its basis was decidedly the economic critique of the colonial state. The argument was that the extractive and exploitative power that colonialism exerted on the nation disabled the economic development of its people. Every particular assertion of linguistic, class, caste, regional identity, henceforth, was to be subsumed within the framework of the whole nation and its interests.

The inclusion of culture in the Five-Year Plans was a crucial and far reaching exercise towards the cultural project of nation-building in India. As the Planning Commission documents from this period show, culture was not seen as a marginal space accommodated under the ‘arts & culture’ portfolio; rather, it was integral to the concept of planned national development and the exercise of planning. It was for the very first time that performance had emerged as objects of state policy. It was also the most definitive move towards the cultural sector, the resources of which were now to be managed and allocated towards various activities governed by the state. As an activity that entailed “assessment of the past and a call for the future” , the inclusion in the Five-Year Plans evinced the centrality of the arts to the task of nation-building, keeping alive the imaginary of the un-fragmented nation (Second Five-Year Plan, 1956, vii). The assimilation of cultural forms and the regional identities they carried into the newly reintegrated nation came to stand in for the Nehruvian slogan of ‘unity in diversity’. The SNA played a pivotal role in determining an authentic Indian aesthetic as well as modernising its operations through including culture as a subject of planning.

Reading ‘Culture’ in the Five-Year Plans

The strategic subsumption of culture within social agendas of development has been a recurrent tendency of state planning in India. A reading of the Five-Year Plans throws some light on the position of the arts within the larger agenda of the ‘nation’. In the First Five-Year Plan (1951-56), ‘culture’ is not as an independent entity, but a subcategory of the larger rubric of ‘Ed-

ucation' that itself falls under 'Social Services and Rehabilitation'²⁶. Even though its inclusion in the national planning documents under 'Education' foregrounds its perceived pedagogic role, neither does it qualify as a knowledge domain nor as a social and economic practice. Instead, it is tied to the task of nation-building and producing 'integrated personalities' through the state's educational programme. The role of culture was to develop the creative faculties" of the masses and encourage "a spirit of critical appreciation of the arts", thereby alleviating their cultural tastes, so far not fully developed and exploited (First Five-Year Plan, 525). Art and cultural forms were imagined as tools for rationalising the planning process itself. The utility of planning to modern nation-building was to be relayed to the nation through publicity programmes using song and drama units at the Centre and State level linking the success of planning and of democracy itself to "the sense of disciplined citizenship among the people" (Jathar, G.B. and K.G. Jathar, 1957, 30). The view of cultural practitioners as agents of the agendas of development of their patron state, is to be found in several successive planning documents.

It is in the Second (1956-61) and Third (1961-66) Five-Year Plan documents that culture finds a more substantive mention and financial allocation. The SNA, established already in 1953, along with other two national akademies²⁷, appears in the section on 'cultural and other programmes', under the rubric of education, prefacing the larger goals of economic development. A

²⁶ For the Indian educator, J.P. Naik, the government's role in policy-making in the field of education in India in the first decade after independence marks a dominating trend towards centralisation in education that "has had hardly any parallel in our educational history except for the brief spell under Lord Curzon" (Naik, 1963, 1). This observation can be extended to the realm of culture since the latter was both conceptually and constitutionally imagined as a component of the larger rubric of education.

²⁷ Sahitya Kala Akademi and Lalit Kala Akademi, both established in 1954

total provision of Rs. 307 crores is made for education in the Second Plan²⁸, about twice as large as that made in the First Plan (Rs. 169 crores, out of which Rs. 44 crores was allocated at the Centre and Rs. 125 crores at the States level). In the Second Plan, an expenditure of Rs. 4 crores was incurred on the various ‘cultural programmes’, Rs. 2.6 crores at the Centre level and Rs. 1.4 crores at the States level (Planning Commission, Second Five-Year Plan, n.d.). The Third Plan allocation on cultural activities is Rs. 10 crores—Rs. 6 crores to the Centre and Rs. 4 crores to the States (Planning Commission, Third Five-year Plan, n.d.)

The overt decolonising impulse of the early planning activity manifests in the programme for institutionalisation of language, art, and museum practice from the Second Plan onwards. This was to be achieved through a complex network of state institutions whose task was to promote, document, and standardise ‘Indian’ forms of music, dance, and theatre²⁹. It is in the Third Plan (1961-66) that a clearly instrumental understanding of culture emerges as a means to harness the economic and social wealth of the nation. This period also witnesses a broader shift from the preceding decade’s focus on rebuilding ‘rural India’ and securing opportunities for weaker and under-privileged sections to giving a more precise content and structure to the goal of “self-reliant and self-generating economic growth” —a move away from the rural to the urban, from the poor to the middle classes as priorities, in the development planning of the state (Planning Commission, Third Five-Year Plan, n.d.). The discourse of heritage, acquisition, and

²⁸ As part of the Second Five-year Plan, an allocation of Rs. 12 crores was made to the central government towards a number of scholarship schemes to students from scheduled tribes, scheduled castes, and other backward classes including post-matriculation scholarships, research, overseas and cultural scholarships for Asian, African and other foreign students for study in India. Out of these, five hundred scholarships were allocated for young artists in different fields.

²⁹ The Second Plan lays emphasis on development and dissemination of Sanskrit, re-organisation and development of museums, like the National Gallery of Modern Art, the National Archives of India, and agencies like the Department of Archaeology, the Department of Anthropology, and Central Institute of Indology.

preservation dominate, marking a shift from the urgency of the present to the cultural inheritance of the past from which culture must be redeemed in response to the urges of a new generation. The proposal for ‘revival and development’ of India's composite cultural heritage mentioned in the Third Plan essay the state’s efforts to map, historicise, and delineate national traditions. Archaeological monuments, ancient art, rare manuscripts, and “communicating India’s underlying cultural unity” became central to actualising its project of cultural development (Dhawan, M.L., 2005, 126).

Significantly, the reference to theatre with regard to cultural development and integration comes by way of provisioning for the construction of a National Theatre in order to fuel a theatrical culture embedded in traditional cultural forms of the nation. The need for a national theatre had been articulated since the early 1940s by cultural nationalists, some of whom also came to occupy important institutional positions at SNA³⁰. The financial allocation for it in the Second Plan demonstrates the state’s eagerness to shape an Indian modernity through theatre. In the Third Plan, there is a supplemental allocation for the construction of a large open-air theatre in Delhi. Yet, despite these early moves towards institutionalization and increased financial allocation towards education³¹ Culture continued to appear in the planning system’s hierarchies to play a subsidiary role to education with only a minimal part of it being directed towards the performing arts. There is also a continued emphasis from the Second Plan on developing cultural relations with other countries for which the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) was created in 1950, launching culture as an instrument of the nation’s soft power and a resource to unify

³⁰ The reference here is explicitly to Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay

³¹ Arts and Letters, a National Theatre, Children’s Museums, the National Library (Calcutta), the Gallery of Modern Art, National Library (Calcutta), a Central Reference Library in Delhi, publication of a National Bibliography.

intra and inter-national entities³². Concurrently, the debates on colonialism, modernity, and the role of culture in social development taking place in SNA at this time, give shape to its vision for an 'Indian idiom' of theatre and performance that draws inspiration and energy from tradition. The discourse on tradition in the first three Five-Year Plan documents offer an impression of pre-figuring the moves that SNA would make from the mid-1960s onwards.

Negotiating with Existing institutions: Affiliation and Recognition

The process of self-definition of SNA in its early years is tied intricately to its early institutionalising activities, the most significant and urgent of which included negotiating its position and relationship with not only newly established institutions but also incorporating existing institutions into the cultural space of the nation. An important feature of this was 'affiliation and recognition' to cultural institutions "to formulate a broad-based policy on scientific and systematic lines" (SNA, 1958, 57). The system of institutional recognition and affiliation proceeded from the acknowledgment of the undeniable presence of cultural centres and institutions in the field of music, dance, and drama and the multiplicity of cultural production and consumption across venues and contexts. The practice of 'recognition' was for existing institutions that had made outstanding contributions to the fields that concerned the Akademi, assisting it in ascertaining a "priority of work" through collection and research of forms, training, experimentation and production, etc (SNA, 1958, 63). It was through its 'coordinating and cooperating' activities with these institutions that SNA aimed to encourage the "exchange of ideas and techniques between the regions " to enrich Indian culture as a whole (SNA, 1958, 57). The practice and right of 'affiliation' were exclusively for newly created regional Akademies set up in collaboration with the

³² The Third Five Year Plan's scheme commissioned reproductions of paintings, sculptures and Indian Art for the use of cultural organisations in foreign countries through the ICCR (Third five year plan document).

state governments, securing for the affiliated units privileges, such as continued monetary grants and support for projects of regional character. The regional units were to take forward the agendas of the state that was constantly expanding its sphere of operations across regions, languages, forms, and categories of art. It is through the affiliate institutions, recognized and supported by the Akademi, that SNA carried out its manifold functions of collection, research, survey, training, experimentation, production, publication, etc. These regional akademies were to become the link between the central SNA and its regional beneficiaries—local organisations, artist communities, art institutions, and audiences. Additionally, they were expected to play the supervisory role for other institutions in the region and make recommendations to the central academy for bestowing benefits, such as recognition and grants. Regional units of SNA and older art institutions recognised by it were both meant to be instruments of outreach of the Akademi. The pre-existing feudal and commercial structures of patronage and institutions of training were either appropriated or bracketed as an affiliate, establishing it as the focal point around which a uniform and co-ordinated pattern of cultural work would be carried out in the Centre and the states.

The relationship between these pre-existing institutions to those that were set up in post-independence India to serve the purpose of nation-building and artistic reconstruction was, at best, a complex one. On the one hand, colonial administrative structures and institutions were deemed suspect of Orientalist scholarship and practice, highly influenced by Western arts, culture, and academic temperament and therefore rejected as models on which to build new national culture in each of these fields. But administratively, these very institutions were deemed useful for providing the basis for the state to build a unified network of institutions with a nationalist cultural agenda, a discourse that erased the multiplicity and cosmopolitanism embodied in exist-

ing institutions. The disappointments and disagreements, in some cases violent and a catalyst for long-lasting political struggles for regional cultural identity, that emanated from the realignments of the linguistic reorganisation of states were counterposed, or at least partly and temporarily vindicated by SNA's system of recognition, affiliation, and awards. By doing so, SNA not only secured and centralised its position within the cultural landscape of the nation, but also legitimised institutions, their practices, and their very existence within the new nation. In most cases, this was a mutually desirable exercise—SNA's recognition and affiliation determined the future for the regional institutions, and in turn, projected SNA's vital position as the patron and in-charge of the nation's cultural past and future. It is most vividly reflected in the demand for recognition for the contribution made by the Music Academy in Madras, one of the upper-caste institutions to be accorded national status, whose legacy and position in the domain of classical music had been well established by the time³³. The Music Academy had been functioning in Madras for twenty years towards preservation of Carnatic music, supported largely by public donations and the enthusiasm of its regional patrons and bank loans to acquire property for its auditorium. Sriram Venkatkrishnan³⁴ suggests that the proposal for recognizing well-established cultural institutions like the Music Academy as the regional academy, if not as the National Cultural Trust, must have found takers from within these institutions but the metamorphosing of this plan into a central SNA located in Delhi³⁵ followed by the setting up of SNA'S regional units by the

³³ Locating the National Academy for Music in Madras had been part of the early discourse and planning of cultural institutions.

³⁴See Venkatkrishnan, Sriram. "Academy but not Akademi." *The Hindu*, 10 July 2009, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-fridayreview/academy-but-not-akademi/article659132.ece>,

³⁵ The central SNA dedicated itself to the collection of manuscripts, gramophone records of past and present musicians, and dance costumes from its corpus of funds allocated for music.

mid-1950s left many institutions like the Music Academy to fend for itself. The Madras Academy continued to receive support from artists in the form of fee waivers for concerts and donations in order to survive, eventually attracting SNA's grant towards its building fund and research activities but only from 1961 onwards.

Significantly, the intention to broaden the state institutional apparatus for culture and to install a hierarchy of art institutions in the first decade after independence was not so much to decentralise the powers and operations of the Akademi but to create a spread of institutions, public and private, and across forms of art and performance, that would “share a common sense of purpose”, “foster kinship with the central body” and be supervised by it (SNA, 1958, 57). This consolidated and legitimised the cultural maxims of the state and created a unified national framework for art while incorporating diversity and reassessing histories of cultural practice. In the process, performance practice was structured and categorised into culturally manageable domains. The consolidated five-year report of SNA lists the creation of eight regional Sangeet Natak Akademies during this period (in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Mysore, Madhya Pradesh, Madras, Orissa, and Rajasthan); and over two hundred institutions affiliated and recognised by the central SNA from all over the country including a hundred and eleven in the field of music, fifty-four in drama, and forty-three in dance (1958, 55-58). From its inception in 1953 to 1958, only eight state governments had set up regional akademies out of the thirteen odd states in the Indian union which increased to twelve regional akademies in 1963-64. The procedure for Akademi recognition was mandated to acknowledge “the existence of an institution rendering outstanding service in the field of dance, drama and music” (ibid., 63). Interestingly, the process and rationale of granting affiliation or recognition did not lay down any criteria

but only a loose set of bureaucratic requirements. Financial assistance to existing institutions could be sought for research, survey, development, revival, and preservation of forms that were perceived to be in danger of becoming extinct, thereby placing the institutional wager squarely on tradition and heritage. The disbursement of financial assistance to promote and foster creativity in these fields was competitive. A state-wise distribution of Akademi recognized institutions and their fields reveal that while most institutions affiliated by SNA were from the state of Mysore (five in the field of theatre and twenty music institutions) followed closely by Bombay which had the maximum number of theatre institutions in the country (fifteen in Bombay alone out of the total fifty-four drama affiliates) (SNA, 1958, 64). The other states that had institutions of drama recognized by SNA included Delhi (five), Andhra Pradesh (seven), West Bengal (three), Madras (five), and Mysore (five) (ibid). The grants sanctioned by SNA to over two hundred regional affiliates, including a hundred and eleven, fifty-four and forty-three institutions each in the fields of music, drama, and dance, in the first five years of its existence (1953-58) increased more than five times from Rs.75,000/- in 1953-54 to Rs. 4,00,000 in 1957-58 (SNA, 1958, 71). The prominence of established theatre institutions such as Indian National Theatre and Natya Sangh, Bombay grew with the recognition that came from SNA affiliation and grants made towards fulfilling its objectives.

SNA Annual Awards: Politics of Categorisation and Reinvention of the Classical

One of the most significant initiatives launched by SNA, almost immediately after its inception, was the institution of 'Akademi Awards' to eminent artists; the highest conferred on practicing artists in the country, inventing a tradition of 'recognition' and creating categories in which an emerging national culture was to be celebrated. 'Presidential Awards' in Hindustani and

Carnatic music, vocal and instrumental, had already been in place since 1951³⁶, to which awards in the arts of dance and drama were added in 1954. Dance awards were given in the newly constituted category of the ‘classical’ covering four styles—Bharatnatyam, Kathakali, Kathak, and Manipuri and a ‘Folk Dance Trophy’ was given for the best folk dance troupe at the National Folk Dance Festival held as part of the Republic Day celebrations. Film awards followed in 1955, one each in ‘Acting’ and ‘Music Direction’. SNA Annual Report, 1955 clearly states that the changing nature and form of patronage needed to be extended and brought in conformity with the changed relationship between the arts and its patrons (1956, 51). Within the first five years of its existence, SNA claimed to have built and nurtured the tradition of awards that was “symbolic of the change that has completely modified the status of the artists in relation to [his] new patron- the people and the state” (SNA Report, 1958-59: 27). Here the state came to stand in for the people or their government, and recognition by it represented the “voice and conscience of the arts and artists for whom it was formed” (ibid). SNA Awards were a prime modality through which the fundamental question of standards of achievement in the fields of culture was addressed. They also offer an insight into the delicate relationship of the newly formed linguistic states with the centre, negotiating claims for cultural preeminence.

The ongoing struggle towards claiming discreet cultural identities for the newly formed linguistic states was a process of negotiation that the newly instituted SNA, as well as the states, underwent. The creation of a linguistic state as a unitary regional entity was often followed by demands for cultural recognition of its performance forms. For the states and practitioners of these forms, who Srinivasan calls the “new elite class of amateur performers”, the SNA awards

³⁶ With the institution of SNA, these awards came to be called the ‘Akademi Awards’ with their investiture becoming the Akademi’s responsibility (ibid.)

and recognition was a way of entering the national cultural canon, guaranteeing the benevolence of the new patron, the state (1985, 1875). This is evident in the increasing number of representations by regions and older cultural institutions seeking recognition for forms and inclusion into the state's classification of classical forms. For the state, the awards were a way of marking spheres of excellence and creating a pedigree of experts, practitioners, and pedagogues who would steer the national cultural movement. The individual states' assertions of authenticity and antiquity were articulated in their definitions of history and lineage of their cultural forms. The SNA Annual Report documents the struggles for state recognition of forms like, Kuchipudi, Odissi, Satriya, Chhau etc. that were sought to be added to the four existing classical dance categories³⁷. SNA, for its part, attempted to enclose cultural practices and forms within regional states through instituting awards and grants. It can be further argued that while SNA managed to settle the claim to 'classical' made by regional traditional dance forms, amicably, it could not keep the category of the classical intact and eventually set up awards in two new categories —'Traditional Dance Forms' and 'Modern Indian Dance'— that included 'modern', as a response to the claims made by many forms other than the classical, for similar recognition from the state. The history of assembling and institutionalising of Indian classical dance and music from the early twentieth century onwards has been well-researched and documented. Loss of the

³⁷ The SNA Annual Report (1958-59) mentions the issue of 'classification' of dance forms coined for giving Akademi awards that was debated in the Dance Seminar of 1958. The Akademi's policy of awards became an important and recurrent question, specifically in dance as the basis of classification was questioned and more forms were demanded to be included within the classical canon like *Kuchipudi*, *Odissi*, *Satriya*, *Chhau*, etc. The expert committee that was setup to address the issue recommended grants for setting up training schools for the development of these forms rather than any awards, along with gathering detailed information for comprehensive classification of all forms of dance practiced in different regions. Two completely new categories were added to the existing ones—'traditional dance forms' that included forms such as *Yakshagana*, *Kutiyattam*, *Raslila*, *Gotipuha*, and 'modern Indian dance'. Eventually, SNA brought within the classical awards category those dance forms that hinged on the classical and had been claiming that status, i.e., *Odissi* (1966), *Satriya* (1963), *Chau* (1963), *Mohiniattam* (1972). etc.

repertoire by hereditary performers of music and dance due to the collapse of earlier systems of patronage and the pressures of social reform movements offered the space for their reinvention and reformulation. The formal, stylistic, and aesthetic transformations made to traditions were meant to give these forms respectability, nativity, and an authentic Indian identity. Existing scholarship reconstructs the processes of reform and revival of dance forms as ‘classical’ arguing that an examination of the elite metropolitan discourses surrounding these forms reveals something significant about the workings of modernity in South India (Soneji, Daves 2012) ; records the de-eroticizing of dance and the gradual erosion of social, economic, and performance rights of the dancer/*devadasi* (Soneji, Vishwanathan and Peterson, 2008); analyses the modernist reconstructions of Carnatic music as a distinct and pure form, unsullied by Muslim and Western influences, and its identification with the ‘sacred’(Subramaniam, 1999); and foregrounds the appropriation of the ‘classical’ by the privileged middle-class and Brahmin practitioners³⁸ (Ashish Khokar, 1998). These studies demonstrate the complex imbrications of puritan colonial ideology, the Brahmin-dominated notions of post-colonial nationalism, as well as the complex issues of regional and linguistic identity. They address questions of caste politics, questions of gender and female sexuality in the production of hybrid performance traditions, performers, and pedagogical practices. Forging the ancientness of dance and music forms as far back in antiquity as possible

³⁸ The story of *Bharatnatyam* is one of politicisation of the Devadasi community and their dance that gained momentum in the 1920s with the anti-nautch agitation, the Dravidian communal politics, and the sexual autonomy of the Devadasi seen by the Brahmin-dominated Theosophical movement and the conservative Congress ideologues. The denigration of *Sadir*, the temple dance form, that had already been underway before the 1947 legislation forbidding women’s dedication to temple deities, was completely wiped out by the processes of reform and revival. The reinvention of *Sadir* and *Dasiyattam* into the brahminised ‘*Bharatanatyam*’ is intricately tied to the moral and religious idealisation, “itself an effect of westernisation” that led to the “re-classification of regional, artistic traditions within a unique territorially-defined framework of unity” articulated in terms of “the spiritual and civilisational advantages of Indian and eastern philosophies and techniques” (Srinivasan, 1875). The process of sanitisation and reinvention of *Bharatnatyam* began with the establishment of Kalakshetra Dance Academy in 1936 by Rukmini Devi Arundale and involved replacing *shringara rasa*, its sensuality and eroticism with religious emphasis and dominance of Bhakti as the overall effect of the form.

and tracing their historical continuity all the way back to the Vedas, particularly the *Natyashastra*, was central to the process of institutionalisation of the performing arts carried out actively by the SNA at the time of its inception. Cherian notes that the National Awards allowed the Akademi to center the “discourse of tradition firmly within the framework of the state”, thereby naturalizing the nation-state and “conferring it an indigenous and ancient vintage” (2009, 45)

It is in contrast to the processes of revival and reform in classical dance and music, that the process of institutionalisation of theatre took shape. Unlike in dance where region-specific forms were categorised as either ‘classical’, ‘modern’, or ‘folk’ on the basis of their historical lineage and proximity to *Natyashastra*, the theatre awards did not demonstrate any categorisations and distinctiveness of forms on regional or stylistic basis. Instead, the categories of awards in ‘Drama’ signal the history of hybridisation of forms, style, and structures of modern professional theatre, its professionalisation and commercialisation, without attention to its performative bearings or to its ability to constantly adapt, innovate, and modernise. SNA identified two major creative activities in the field of theatre that were to be recognised through a system of awards instituted in 1954, which were ‘Acting’ and ‘Playwriting’. This was followed by awards in a new category the following year, ‘Production’ or ‘Direction’, given alternatively with ‘Playwriting’ (in 1955-56 and 1956-57), while acting remained the fixed category. It is significant to note that the distinct role and figure of the playwright had emerged as recently as the late nineteenth century in the commercial theatre companies of Karnataka, Bengal and Maharashtra. Influenced by the English Victorian tradition that centred around the figure of the actor-manager, the playwright was not a separate entity in the urban Indian theatre and often worked along with the director and actor in translating, adapting, and re-scripting playtexts as per the demands of the pro-

duction. The separation of the playwright from the director and of the actor from the director/manager was a result of the professionalisation of theatre, which was itself a result of colonial modernity³⁹. It is as late as the 1920s, with the arrival of the first Brechtian plays and the advent of more conscious actor-directors, that a new sensibility in theatre emerges which is respectful and reverent towards the creator of texts and an independent place for the playwright is established. The separation of the actor from the director and the distinct position of the actor owing to their unique style and stardom was also part of the history of successful commercial theatre of the late nineteenth century, curiously absent from SNA's early documents and reports. Lawrence Levine in his seminal work on hierarchisation of cultural forms in America argues that the commonly used categories of culture are neither neutral nor eternal or trans-historical descriptions of aesthetic content (1990). Rather, they must be seen as part of a socio-historical process by which public culture and cultural space transform, making social groups define their own status and ascribe rigid value, popularity and artistic merit to these forms (ibid). SNA's deployment of the categories of classical and modern as opposed to each other (as in the case of dance) and the expulsion of the popular from the modern, is the culmination of the project of cultural nationalism of the late nineteenth century that used performing arts to invent national cultural traditions while keeping intact, even perpetuating through its institutional structures, the existing social structure and its class and caste hierarchies.

³⁹ Sisir Kumar Bhaduri's public performance of the play *Sita*, based on a text by D.L.Roy by the same name, at the Eden Garden Exhibition in December 1923, in Calcutta marks the entry of independent playwrights, not working for any theatre company and with formal permissions and royalty paid to the writer. The play was performed as part of the colonial institution of exhibitions for the display of British cultural might and power over the colony. It attacked and critiqued Rama over the mistreatment of Sita in the last phase of the epic story when Sita returned from Ravana's Lanka. Bhaduri is also considered the first modern Bengali theatre director and credited with conceiving the theatre production as a representational whole in its entirety, with the various aesthetic materials of theatre, bringing together sound, light, movement, use of space, pace, rhythm with the performance of the actor.

While in dance, the rising involvement and interest of the new nationalist middle-class in the early twentieth century had consolidated the spiritual and nationalist aspects of cultural forms as the signifiers of a cultured class with refined (high) taste in the arts; a modern theatrical form suitable to the needs of the new urban intelligentsia was yet to be invented. Anita Cheriau further notes that the “lack of characterisation” of SNA’s awards in theatre also invited us to assume that “the subcontinent’s already existing theatrical traditions were irrelevant to its postcolonial future” (2009, 53). By this she is suggesting that the Parsi theatre tradition as well as the Progressive Indian People’s theatre movement, IPTA, were systematically effaced from SNA’s discourse of the time. While SNA’s historicising of Indian theatre is the subject of analysis in the following chapter that focuses on the 1956 Drama Seminar, it is important to point here that both the popular Parsi tradition as well as the organised activities of IPTA had ceased to exist by the time the SNA was created⁴⁰. SNA’s preponderance of the traditional, classical, and the documentary in these early years underlines its ideological and aesthetic bias, defining its early policy for the performing arts, yet, this move did not equivocate easily in categorising, demarcating, and institutionalising theatre. This may partly be due to the existence of disparate and multiple forms, altered by the competing forces of colonialism, nationalism, and modernity, with performative differences of a cultural and linguistic kind that resist any easy categorisation and homogenisation.

⁴⁰ The former being run over by the diverging capital towards newer forms of mass entertainment, the cinema and its growing popularity, and the latter, collapsing due to its own internal organisational issues along with the change in the political context.

This is particularly the case with the popular theatre traditions of the time⁴¹. The Drama Seminar of 1956 served precisely the purpose of mapping the heterogeneous terrain of ‘Indian theatre’ and the polyphonic voices that existed within it to constitute theatre as a subject of policy.

And yet, theatre was the preferred form for rehearsing the nation and its diversity while articulating a new cultural sovereignty, unique to the postcolonial conditions of the time. It is in the domain of theatre that SNA stages its earliest and most consistent interventions towards institutionalisation through drama festivals that were to become a regular feature of the Akademi activities and cultural displays that began as early as 1950 (see next section). In November 1954, a year after its inception, the SNA organized the ‘First National Drama Festival’ to highlight the “diversity and range of modern theatre activity” with subsequent festivals being held in 1955 and a Drama competition in 1956 (SNA, 1953–1958 Report, 35). The tremendous interest generated by it is also clear by the number of applications received— nine hundred performances were submitted for acceptance to the festival in fourteen languages, of which only twenty-two productions were selected for staging. These productions reflected a variety of themes including the historical, the mythological, and the social, and included six languages—Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Kannada, Telugu, and Punjabi. The festival opening with an the sanskrit classic, “Shakuntala””, and closing with “Oedipus Rex”, a Greek classic, clarified the range and form of dramatic activity that it would support, positioning ‘the traditional’, centrally (Sangeet Natak Akademi Report 1953–1958, 35). In 1957, the Akademi instituted two new awards in theatre—‘Best Drama

⁴¹ The hybridity of existing popular theatre, its unapologetic use of music, dance, and visual grammar from traditions new and old, classical and folk, as well as its unique mobility and capacity to synthesise and absorb techniques and content, disregarding any stylistic or regional purity, alongwith innovative use of emerging stage technologies— had created an institution that was both agile to social and political transformations, as well as irreverent to any quiescent and homogenising notion of tradition. Scholars of popular Indian theatre, specifically the Parsi theatre, posit that these qualities had helped theatre circumvent the contrivance of both the colonial state and the nationalist middle-class (Kapur, 2004; Gupta S., 2005; Hansen, 2003).

Script’ and ‘Best Play Production’—as part of the Drama Competition in Hindi and Tamil to encourage new dramatic writing and their production⁴². Dramatic activity and SNA’s selection, curation, and organising of the festival laid out the contours of the theatrical field. It also positioned the culturally admissible theatrical forms into the framework of the nation, while at the same time determining the theatrical work that merited appearance on the national stage. The process of selection, festival curation, and categorisation unfolded a process of ‘bourgeois-fiction’ in theatre, a process that had already been underway in dance and music.

Folk Performance Culture: Recording, Documentation and Preservation

The first decade of SNA’s inception saw the active restructuring and reconstruction of traditional performance forms through various modes of recognition and support. On the one hand, the Akademi’s interventions to reinvent and institutionalise classical music and dance traditions served the state’s purpose of inventing an ‘Indian’ modernity in response to Western standards of notation, achievement, and sexuality. They were equally a response to local popular forms of music and dance that had emerged in the recent past, transforming and adapting to the social and political changes with time. This became a way for the elite and upper caste Indians to claim their own ‘ancient’ traditions and ‘Indian-ness’, while differentiating themselves from the lower classes. On the other hand, the category of ‘folk’ was seen as a crucial link between the classical and the modern, the past and the present. The SNA saw its task to “narrow the gulf between the dramatic forms that have developed during the last hundred years and the survivals

⁴² The SNA Report states that forty-two Hindi groups and eighteen Tamil groups competed in the play production competition. In Hindi, ninety-one scripts were submitted by seventy-seven playwrights and ninety-four playwrights submitted ninety-seven scripts in Tamil (SNA 1957, 10).

from the past” , in order to construct an unbroken and continuous history of Indian theatrical tradition (SNA REPORT 1953-58, 31). In this unbroken lineage of performance, the classical was conflated with Sanskrit forms associated with brahmanical traditions, and the folk with vernacular, regional, and rural cultural forms. Modernity, in the context of performance, needs to be understood in response to the religious and sacred, that had been the contextual grounds for performance to appear so far. In the realm of folk culture and arts, modernity and tradition were seen in opposition to one another; modernity and its associates—social development, literacy, urbanism, etc. were all perceived as a threat to the existence of folk cultural forms that needed the protection of the state. The importance and urgency of the folk arts drew from the dangers of modernisation—literacy, urbanisation, and commercial entertainment—that would affect “deterioration and irreparable loss” of traditional modes of artistic expression (SNA REPORT 1953-58, 82). Stating clearly its priorities as "setting up of high standards for creative activity," and "provid[ing] necessary field of expression for creative urge [sic] by opening new avenues and giving various incentives . . . to help continue the art traditions which stood in imminent danger of decay and total extinctions [sic]" , SNA had its foundational years itself established that continuity and creativity were to be seen together in the frame of (past) tradition that had to be made part of the nation’s present (SNA 1958–59). The programme of ‘revival and revitalisation’ of folk arts was, therefore, premised upon the discourse of decay and disappearance.

Between 1953-58, the Akademi undertook the project of ‘Filming & Recording’ all “authentic folk-lore”, acquiring mechanically recorded music and dance traditions, “valuable articles like folk instruments, costumes, jewellery and many other items of folk interest” and funding other institutions to carry out projects of folk arts of varied importance (SNA 1958, 10-11). It is

interesting to note that this ethnographic exercise and its attendant rationale of traditionalism did not address either the question of the contemporary practice of these forms or its practitioners, i.e. the ‘folk’ or hereditary performers and the bearers of folk culture, who were living in precarious conditions of poverty and social backwardness in a context where older forms of patronage had ceased to exist. SNA annual report of the same year, mentions the ‘Artists’ Welfare Fund’ for those who were in need of financial aid due to “indigent circumstances or old age”, which was still pending and being examined by a committee for its practical implications (SNA REPORT 1953-58, 96). The activities of survey, documentation, recording, and filming of folk traditions to preserve and disseminate folklore launched from 1953 onwards and gained prominence in the first five years of the Akademi with its budget increasing three times from Rs 20,000 in 1954 to 60,000 in 1959 (SNA Annual report 1958-59, 61).

The inclusion of a cultural pageant displaying the nation’s cultural strength, unity, and diversity, along with showcasing its military power since the first Republic Day parade in 1950, also reflects the early policies in the realm of culture that centred around building a national identity and a sense of unitary national tradition. As an annual cultural extravaganza, the parade and its cultural exhibits of diverse regional artistic forms became a ritual asserting a new nation’s self-image and its cultural and military strengths. Equally, it provided a unifying effect to the ‘nation’ amidst the growing challenges to its territorial integrity. Jyotindra Jain contextualizes the spectacle of the Republic Day parade as an exercise in “image mobilization”, evolving a range of visual symbols, performances, and cultural icons (2007). The central objects of these displays were and have continued to be India’s ethnic identities, its tribal people, and their cultural expressions that were displayed alongside other national resources—military, defense, and person-

nel. The underlying message of these performances, handled directly by the Prime Minister's Office in the early years of their existence, and open to large audiences, telecast live all over the country and consumed by Indians living all over the world, has been cultural nationalism. Jain argues that the rhetoric of 'unity in diversity', that became the driving force behind the conceptualisation of the cultural tableaux, was meant to counter the assertive demands for redrawing the map of India on ethnic or linguistic divides that began in the early years of independence. With the explicit intention to revitalise the folk arts, the Akademi instituted the 'National Folk Dance Trophy' for the best dance performance by a participating troupe in 1954 at the National Folk Dance Festival held as part of the republic day celebrations in the capital. The folk dance competition presented a carefully selected variety of folk dances, from the 'inexhaustible fund of folk-dances' of India, many of which were witnessed by Delhi audiences for the first time (SNA Annual report 1958-59, 15). The proceeds of this ticketed show went to the 'National Folk Dance Fund' with the vision of promoting the dance forms and giving back to the folk performers. It also provided an occasion for a cultural survey of existing dance forms for a record of regional folklore. The organization of the National Folk Dance Festival involved the military that was entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing it during the Republic Day celebrations, with the Akademi having no say in matters of selection of forms, groups, or other organizational matters. Scholars of art have critiqued the staging of these cultural spectacles on two accounts—firstly, the manner in which they were rooted in colonial representations of tribal and indigenous populations in Orientalist photographs, colonial exhibitions, and museum dioramas; and secondly, for the "state-sponsored" show of diversity' where officials determine how tribes and regions are presented, rather than the people whose cultural forms are put to display (Jain, Jyotindra, 2007;

Vidyathi, Govind, 1969). The cultural displays, tableaux and dances were “strategically reshaped, and sometimes even invented” producing ““Culture” as an effect” and arguably the nation itself (Jain, *ibid*). Despite early attempts to centre the ‘folk forms’ through national rituals like the Republic Day Parade, dance and performance practitioners have also continued to point to the pitiable plight of the traditional performance artists, the folk. These tableaux appropriate the sensuousness of the form and rally it in service of the militaristic state’s celebrations of hyper-nationalism. These initiatives were rooted in colonial values, morality, and high culture and were propelled by the nationalist movement that viewed culture as a resource for national struggle against colonialism and a tool for integration. It also embodied the understanding of forms as discrete styles and in terms of their aesthetics, rather than as knowledge systems or carriers of social belief, tradition, and cultural practice of the community it belonged to. Formations and shifts in the relationship between the state as the new patron of arts and performance traditions deprived the practitioners of any real choice and agency of the forms, placing the repertoire firmly within the custody of the social elite and the state institutions.

The folk dance festival and the Republic Day Parade became the national sites for negotiating regional and national identities, subsuming the region, the local community, the tribe, and its ‘folk’ into the nation as its subjects. The formation of SNA provided an institutional framework and the historical precedent for redefining and restructuring tribal and regional forms of art and cultural performance to suit the demands of the state and its desire for a unified national culture. The thrust of the discourse surrounding the traditional had to do with antiquity and classicism. Dance and theatre traditions, whose origins could be traced back to the *Natyashastra*, were pronounced to be classical traditions that had survived the invasive forces of colonialism and

modernisation. This process continued well into the 1970s and 80s when the rhetoric of ‘authenticity’ and ‘purity’ of cultural forms became SNA’s explicit focus, developing a cultural identity and discourse based on formulaic notions of folk, tradition and indigeneity.

National School of Drama: Instituting a Pedagogical Model of Practice

As an effort to design and methodise training in performance, the establishment of ‘model institutions’, like National School of Drama (1959) and Manipuri Dance Academy, Imphal (1954), was central to SNA’s policy actions towards fulfilling the cultural agenda set forth in the early years of independence, i.e., to create an infrastructure for performance practice and specialist training in theatre and dance. Founding of training institutions in the field of theatre and dance were outcomes of frequent assertions of a distinct national identity through cultural performance. The growing need and demand for modern training in theatre and classical dance became the motivation and means for sustaining the discourse of ‘national forms’, signposted to the past or to a trace thereof, and altered suitably to the needs of the present. Traditional forms of performance, both existing and invented, came to stand-in for the nation itself.

The ground for public manifestation of arts for a new nation had already been laid with the institution of Asian Theatre Institute, ATI, initiated by the Bhartiya Natya Sangh (BNS or the Indian Theatre Guild, estd. in 1949), headed by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, under whose leadership it began its theatre training programme in 1958. ATI had been created with an internationalist perspective towards reinforcing the theatre movement based on indigenous cultural forms within Asia, thereby forging communication and cultural links between countries of the region through theatre. It was premised on the notion of a shared impulse to reconstruct ‘lost traditions’ and ‘ancient stage techniques,’ which if ‘lost’ or ‘attenuated in one country or region,’ had con-

tinued to exist in some other part of Asia (Chattopadhyaya, 1958, 23) It was tasked with collecting information on various cultural performances practiced in Asia, providing advanced training to theatre workers and encouraging experimentation in the performing arts. In so doing, it was thought that an understanding of Western forms as different from the Eastern could be attained, creating a “burgeoning internationalist consciousness, while delineating a sovereign vocabulary for performance”, particularly in a region with shard histories of colonialism (Cherian, 43-4). It may well have been a novel antecedent to diplomacy through cultural exchange between nations in the subcontinent, a vision that Nehru had championed through the creation of ICCR in 1950. Interestingly, the internationalist orientation of ATI’s training programme did not sufficiently fill the vacuum created by the decline of traditional modes of patronage and training through apprenticeship. The need for an institute for training in theatre arts and an allied national theatre was expressed repeatedly in discussions, seminars, and workshops throughout the 1950s. The executive board of the Akademi passed the resolution to set up a drama school at the national level the very next year. Significantly, this institution was decided to be placed directly under the aegis of the SNA. The Estimates Committee of Parliament (1957-58) observed that,

There is a possibility of duplication between the scheme of the NSD proposed to be set up by the Akademi in Delhi and the scheme of the ATI to be established with UNESCO assistance. The committee, therefore, suggests that the two schemes may be amalgamated with a view to avoiding any duplication. (SNA Annual Report 1959: 4-5).

The recommendation was promptly executed with the Akademi taking over ATI’s management from the BNS in July 1958. The ATI’s teaching programmes concluded at the end of 1958, soon after it had begun, and in April 1959 the NSD began its programme, offering a two-

year general diploma course, with opportunities for research. The NSD & ATI were merged into a working unit in July 1959 known as the 'National School of Drama and Asian Theatre Institute'. SNA Annual Report from the year 1963-64 points out that the expenditure on projects of the ATI had been met until 1960, in large measure, out of the contributions received from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) under its programme of participation in the activities of the member states. No contributions from UNESCO were received after this, leaving the ATI to be financed by a government grant, managed by the SNA. The amalgamation of ATI with the NSD lasted fifteen years before both institutions, seeking autonomy, disengaged from SNA.

The history of SNA in its first decade of coming into existence reflects the force and urgency with which institutionalising theatre after independence took shape. Training, documentation and research, and foraging a cohesive national theatre movement became the defining policy goals, which the NSD would fulfil, overseen by SNA's ideological and administrative direction. The foundations of a policy framework in theatre, also in dance, was modelled on a strictly post-colonial imperative aimed towards a cultural and national regeneration through performance training and practice. The SNA report from 1958-59 categorically spells out the motivation for such an institution—"An institution for training in theatrical arts was not only considered a preparatory stage preceding the establishment of the National Theatre but was also necessary to give direction to the creative urge abundantly manifested in recent times at all levels of dramatic activity" (SNA 1959, 3). Amidst a slew of discussions within the Drama Seminar, a key recommendation was the creation of a "central institute for comprehensive training in theatre" to face the handicap of lack of facilities for scientific professional training in theatre including areas of "

acting, production, opera, ballet and playwriting, and should equally emphasise technique and theory, both ancient and modern" (SNA Bulletin, no.6, May 1957, 30-31). The Seminar recommendations also include complimenting these efforts by expanding theatre education in Central and State Governments levels and universities. SNA's desire, as articulated in the Drama Seminar was to create a national theatre not by prescribing a specific style or form but through creating a pedagogic model of theatre practice that espoused the cause of the nation, devised and instituted from the national capital. The setting up of NSD in the capital city follows the creation of SNA a few years ago that invented a centralised official culture on a 'national' scale, offering a 'national' experience that could be standardised and replicated elsewhere.

The issues of standardisation of training, and indeed, of an emergent genre of theatre that could be seen as 'national' are tied to the processes of centralisation of control and planning, concentrated as they were in New Delhi. Form, style, and language were prioritised over content and politics. This step of instituting a national training centre aligned with its own 'straddling the fence' approach towards fulfilling the nationalist agenda of creating new centres of institutional power. It conceived theatre as a product of a historical lineage, recognising its uneven and staggered development, but viewed it from universalist and idealist notions of human expression and aesthetic, devoid of any pressures and considerations of class, caste, or gender. Anita Cherian remarks that with respect to the content, practice, and orientation of the NSD (and Manipuri Dance Academy) in the formative years of its existence, that it was "neither stridently political, nor grossly commercial" (43). The overarching rationale of these early efforts was to channel education and social development through theatre, which had emerged as a viable framework for

state intervention in the arts globally. However, theatre and other performing arts, while being tied closely with development and education, were not seen as a knowledge domain.

Chapter 4

Instituting the Contours of a National theatre: Analysing the Drama Seminar Report, 1956

“It is said that drama creates the conscience of the age. We cannot make people good by acts of parliament. Nor is it possible by constitutional provisions to remove deep-seated social prejudices. We influence social behaviour by creating public opinion.” (Radhakrishnan, Inaugural address at SNA Drama Seminar, 1956, 2007, 16)

“We have to remember while trying to reorganise our professional theatre. . . that our new theatre must be thoroughly national and popular in character. In our attempts [at] building up this national theatre we must make maximum use of indigenous material from our national heritage and its foundations must be firmly laid in our national traditions” (Narain Kale, 232)

“Where knowledge of the past is orally transmitted or where no records exist, the past is perceived entirely in terms of the present accounts. [...] continually reshaped narratives seek to make it appear that tradition has survived unaltered all along; no line divides the historical past from the present” (David Lowenthal, 1958, 231)

The 1956 Drama Seminar organised by the SNA was the first attempt towards forging a cultural identity of the independent nation through theatre. What followed was a crucial programme instituted by SNA with a strong ideological imperative towards theatre. It not only constituted theatre

as an aesthetic entity with a historical lineage and an ideological purpose in the present, but also as a cultural form through which the nation would be imagined. The zeitgeist that animates these discussions is the newly emergent nation that necessitates an authentic national (theatre) culture, chronicling post-colonial nation-building, nationalist anxieties and yearnings, to fulfil which theatre came to occupy a central pedagogic function—defining aesthetic standards and inculcating artistic taste in the populace. The focus remained on the re-constitutive role of the state and its institutions in ensuring the furtherance of theatrical activity. This chapter analyses the paper presentations, discussions, and recommendations of the Drama Seminar, 1956, published as a compiled report by the Akademi in 2004. An examination of select papers and discussions from the seminar proceedings, representing regions of the nation and genres of theatre, offers the institutional framework of nation-building and public investment in the arts through which Indian theatre came to be seen, managed, and categorised by the SNA. These ideas had a definite and determining impact on the direction in which theatre practice and the de-facto national cultural policy in theatre developed in the country for the next three decades. The interventions in theatre and the cultural field at large that followed set it on a parallel trajectory of reconstruction that the nation itself was embarking upon beginning from the 1950s.

The Seminar covered a wide variety of subjects, articulating several historical, administrative, infrastructural, and aesthetic perspectives on Indian theatre practice. The clear and stated objective was to “gather opinions and know the present as well as the past of Indian drama” to define ‘Indian theatre’ and ‘speculate’ its future (17-18). In the words of the seminar director, a theatre director from Bengal, Sachin Sengupta, “to speculate on the future, we must know the present as well as the past [...] if we have been able to use to our benefit the precious heritage

our ancients had left us, or whether we have squandered it away like prodigals" (Sengupta 18). The view of the future of theatre was linked not only to the past but also to those elements of the past that would be commensurate with the narratives of authenticity, indigeneity, and preservation. It is significant to note that despite the diversity of views expressed on the question of the 'future', a recurrent theme for discussion remains the Indian theatrical 'past' and the inherent spiritual unity and strength of its ancient traditions.

The life of a nation does not consist only of material events which happen in the lives of its individual members. It comprises its beliefs and ideals, its traditions and achievements, its aims and aspirations. Contemporary life would include not merely the present but everything in the past which has still [...] meaning and influence (P.V. Rajamannar 12)

The Akademi invited over forty theatre practitioners and experts from the field to reflect on the state of theatre, the challenges of the present, and to lay out a roadmap towards achieving a modern theatre tradition representative of the peculiarities of the Indian context. The Seminar was structured as a series of thirty-four paper presentations and discussions over five days. The idea of the seminar came from the chairman of the Akademi, P.V. Rajamannar, whose question about the future of Indian drama was the prime motivation, ascertaining which was the task of the invitees. In the words of P.V. Rajamannar,

The Akademi, which is charged with preservation and development of the great arts of music, dance, drama, and film, considered that it would be useful and purposeful if some of the leading persons in the world of drama in India could meet and discuss matters and problems relating to the art of theatre (11)

Foregrounding the inclusive, non- bureaucratic, and democratic architecture of the Aademi and its role in “speculating the future” of the arts, the seminar director Sachin Sengupta, posits that the “Akademi is not a bureaucratic body to issue any directive on the subject of future Indian drama and therefore the seminar that would gather opinions of experts devoted to drama" (17). A steering committee appointed by the Akademi chairman under the guidance of its vice-chair, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, chose eminent participants in the field of drama to get the “full benefit of the wisdom and experience of the very best in the field”, taking into consideration only the contributions of experts to the cause of drama (ibid). In his opening speech, Sengupta sets the event apart in its complexion from an academic seminar, underlining its inclusive and representative character, given the transformed context of patronage of the arts.

The arts of dance, drama and music require an immediate response from their patrons as well as their sustained support. Seminars relating to these arts should, therefore, seek to involve patrons and connoisseurs of the arts as far as practicable (ibid).

The significance of the Seminar can be gauged by the fact that it was the first official gathering in independent India that brought to a table several theatre practitioners, scholars, and playwrights who had been working in isolated regional contexts thus far, providing a unique opportunity for exchange of ideas and issues of concern. Writing about the Seminar, Anita Cheria notes that participation was a great honour for invited artists because it signified the Akademi's recognition of their work and gave them the responsibility of shaping what Indian theatre could be in the years to come (2007, 16). For SNA, this provided a ground to build upon the existing theatrical activity in the regions and articulate its agenda for a national theatre. The report offers a blueprint for the Akademi's role in matters related to planning, management, preservation, and

propagation of theatre and dramatic activities. In Max Weber's view, a key characteristic of modern organisational types of administration in contrast to traditional ones is their technical superiority of which a feature is to expand (2009). The next few years saw the formulation and strengthening of the SNA's institutional position through enacting directives and schemes that were deliberated upon in the Seminar and the recommendations made thereafter. The SNA and its early processes of institutionalisation launched at the birth of the nation became techniques through which the nation-state came to take charge of and control the future of the arts.

The Seminar Report generates a language of discourse on culture and an imagination of a national theatre whose unmissable imperatives are to revive, renew, resurrect, regenerate, and reconstruct. The notions of 'tradition', 'modernity', and 'indigeneity' of the theatrical form; the invention of the myths of 'purity', 'authenticity', and 'transcendence'; as well as the polarities through which theatre came to be thought of—'classical' and 'folk', 'rural' and 'urban', 'Indian' and 'Western', 'professional' and 'amateur'—formed the basis of SNA's institutional schemes and interventions. Despite several crucial absences and significant omissions from the cultural discourse and history of Indian theatre, the seminar offers a rare glimpse into a polyphony of voices, views, debates, and discussions of the time. In that, it is an important historical document that complicates any notion of a homogenous national theatre that can be surmised from it, offering, at best, an uneven and complex theatrical terrain. The papers presented at the Seminar, its discussions and proceedings, also archive theatre histories, albeit selectively, and survey diverse contemporary practices, filling the vacuum in existing knowledge of theatre histories, forms, techniques, and performance styles in various languages and locations. As the 'ground report' of the state of theatre in a decade since Indian independence, these discussions emphasise the ques-

tions of history and a usable theatrical past as well as the role that theatre would play in addressing the post-colonial desire for a unique national identity. And yet, despite addressing a vast gamut of areas calling urgent attention, the series of individual papers remained random, lacking any organizing principle for discussions and recommendation thereafter. The Seminar considers culture in its most comprehensive sense, as diverse cultural activities and forms of artistic expression that aim to affect the maturing of a civilized society. It proposes an idealist view, seeing no differentiation between high and low culture (11). This ahistorical and culturally de-contextualised approach leads to flattening of differences in artistic forms of practice disallowing any meaningful engagement with culture that is produced by and addresses specific cultural groups and communities. There is an unmissable urgency towards the future at the cost of the past. By its own admission, the intention driving the Seminar is "... to look ahead to an era in history in which the generation and consumption of culture draws the citizens as a whole into its embrace" (10). This homogenising view of citizens is commensurate with the undifferentiated view of culture that the Seminar proposes.

Some of the key recommendations of the Seminar included repealing the Dramatic Performances Act of 1876 and exempting amateur and professional theatre from entertainment tax. It was envisioned that the state and central governments would provide financial assistance towards theatre in the second Five-Year Plan. The assistance would take the form of an annual budget for construction of theatres, grants to traditional performers, and subsidies and loans to commercial and amateur troupes. The establishment of a comprehensive training programme that would set high standards of theatre practice and offer adequate training facilities in all branches of drama and theatre was an important part of how the state could engineer a modern

theatre movement. As part of this, it was suggested that a central training institution be set up that would not only offer regular training, special courses, camps, and seminars for those already in the field but also liaise with existing training institutions and offer training for folk dramatic troupes. The recommendations note that the programme of regeneration of Indian theatre was dependent on the revival of traditional folk forms across India, whose scientific study, preservation, and promotion through further training, financial assistance, and organisation of festivals were crucial for preventing their disappearance and decay. The inclusion of the study of drama and theatre at the level of school and university education, both as extra-curricular activity as well as a medium of instruction, was deemed important to create a culturally grounded generation that would “strengthen the tradition that was being matured by the present-day efforts” (406). The Seminar welcomed the government’s initiatives of organizing theatre festivals and drama competitions and advocated expanding them to reach out to the remotest corners of the country, while cautioning against their bureaucratic control and supervision. A unique publication programme was proposed to be undertaken by the Akademi to produce research and experiments in drama and theatre from different regions of the country and publishing of translations of important and stage-worthy plays.

Conceptualising a Framework for National theatre: Navigating Language, Region, and Form

The notion of a national theatre has its genesis amidst the upsurge of nationalism and rising national consciousness in eighteenth century Europe where theatre was seen as an alternative occasion for national representation. It signalled a culturally defined national repertoire, creation of a broad national audience, and a stable public institution of theatre that came to stand in for

the nation-state in the making. As Loren Kruger posits, “it foregrounds the staged enactment of national subjects and of the national public whose acknowledgment legitimates such subjects as national” (37). Kruger uses the term ‘theatrical nationhood’ to denote representation of the nation “not only in theatre but by the theatre” bringing to light the ambiguous and contradictory process of staging the nation, “of constituting in the audience the synecdoche of the people while also, in key instances, standing in for an absence of an imperfect nation-state” (36). It was through theatre, with its quality of liveness and the possibilities of public assembly, that the nation would be imagined and performed into existence, and its subjects constituted as a national public. While in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the notion of a national theatre was regarded in most of Western Europe as a means of promoting national—or even imperial —integration; in Eastern Europe, the debates about and later the realization of national theatres often took place within the context of and against oppressive imperiums. But in both parts of Europe the realization of a national theatre was utilized to represent a unified nation in a virtual way, its role being to maintain a single and fixed national identity and a homogeneous and dominant national culture. However, in twentieth century postcolonial contexts the idea of national theatre offers no simplistic translation, becoming a much more ambiguous symbol. Marvin Carlson argues that even though in newly independent African and Asian countries, theatre and its formal institutions were seen as central locations for the expression of a new national consciousness, the establishment of national theatre and the concept of theatre itself had deep associations with European culture and the colonial project (2008, 24-6). The particular socio-historic conjecture at which the question of national theatre is raised in post-colonial nations like India intersects with distorted notions of cultural nationalism that seek to define the nation and its history as the story of continuous

progress, unbroken traditions and indigenous forms of modernity. Playwright and critic, G.P. Deshpande argues that the problem lies not so much in the desire for national theatre but in “the urge to define it”, a move that denies modernity and is against modern theatre (1995, 7).

In the Indian context, while the call for national theatre was routinely voiced since the early 1940s⁴³ and its centrality in the national conscience since the nationalist struggle for independence preceding the birth of the nation, its relevance to the post-independence cultural discourse is much more complex. The notion of a ‘national’ framework for modern Indian theatre, whereby theatre becomes an expression of the modern state’s nationalist ideology, calls upon, as Dharwadker enumerates, at least three aspects of the theatrical form—a national language, a modern urban venue, and a definite repertoire that governs both form and content of its theatrical practice (2005, 23-4). This model of a uniform and representative national theatre is not just untranslatable, but also untenable in the context of a multilingual nation with diverse performative genres and associated belief systems. For this, the crucial prefix ‘Indian’ needs to be defined first, particularly in terms of a form and aesthetic, followed by defining the parameters of what constitutes Indian ‘theatre’ from a wide gamut of existing dramatic practices.

The notion of a national theatre rests on the kinship between people, language, and nation (for which theatre is an important site). In a multicultural and multilingual post-colonial context, language becomes a significant marker of identity and political self-assertion. The coexistence of English alongside many indigenous languages of literary expression and performance culture of

⁴³ A thorough reading of the Seminar proceedings and its repetitive impulse towards a ‘national theatre’ become even more significant when juxtaposed with the generalized positions articulated by a key policy formulator like Kamadevi Chattopadhyay and literary social critic, Baldoon Dhingra, in 1945 and 1944 respectively, close to a decade prior to the seminar. These provide the Seminar not only with theoretical and polemical grounds that place theatre at the center of a ‘national awakening’, but also justify the need for a collective discourse on theatre in the form of the Seminar itself.

India exacerbated the struggle for political representation based on linguistic identity and culture. When seen in this context, the presentations at the Seminar, structured around region and language rather than subject, conventions, or agendas, gain political significance. Although any generalized discussion on 'Indian theatre' must account for the heterogeneous nature of its constituent 'regional theatres', the practice of defining Indian theatre as an assortment of regional practices is also problematic. The isolated view of each regional context and theatrical practice disallows for any meaningful analysis of shared trends and histories. It also creates a discursive abyss in locating issues that affect all theatre/performance practices and artists. This regionalized view of 'Indian theatre' is a construction of the 1956 Drama Seminar, which was itself curated to resemble the ways in which the nation-state was being linguistically restructured, and needs to be seen in the larger context of language politics and linguistic identity assertions of the times. The heterogeneities of the modes of production and reception, locations, class and caste are irreducible to a nation-region dichotomy. While questioning the category of the regional that is pitched against the national in Indian cultural discourse, Deshpande points to the misuse of the term "regional" theatre to describe the tradition of each linguistic region which is in itself a "national" tradition- it becomes imperative to belong to one or the other state/region of India to belong to India (1999, 94-95). The process of state reorganisation had redrawn the regional political boundaries of the nation on the basis of language. The Drama Seminar presentations furnished a cultural topography of the nation, imagining it as the sum of its regional cultural forms that were expected to fit seamlessly into the totality of the nation. As Sachin Sengupta asserts, "India has been a cultural entity in spite of differences in languages, customs, manners, social order, and political set-up" (Sengupta, 1956, 18). As discussed in the previous chapter, the cre-

ation of a federal union was fraught with coerced accessions and regional nationalism, in some cases with continuing demands for independence from the Indian Union and the resentment over cultural dominance of some languages over others. This discomfort is reflected in the Seminar, specifically in the presentations on Punjabi and Assamese language theatres where the dominance of Hindi and Bengali respectively led to a slow and staggered development of the vernacular dramatic literature. The discussions over language and inter-regional dynamics gesture towards the complexities of the states-union relationship. It is within this framework that SNA's prime initiatives, articulated as recommendations in the 1956 Drama Seminar towards preservation, promotion, and study of folk drama through scientific documentation, identification, and subvention for regional forms, need to be considered. Theatrical nationhood, as Kruger argues, is engineered not only through speculation or invention but also as acts of naturalisation, highlighting the power of the institution and the process of its legitimation (2008, 38). SNA becomes the agency through which a distinctively institutional view of the theatrical nation is expressed. Within the larger context of nation-building, of which the Five-Year Plans (1951 onwards), the institution of SNA (1953), and the linguistic reorganization of Indian states (1956 onwards) were vital moments, the Drama Seminar provided the blueprint for re-imagining Indian theatre as the sum of its regional theatres.

On the question of a national repertoire and reclaiming an appropriate 'national' form to serve the national theatre, the Drama Seminar Report is clear in its rejection of the proscenium stage and its allied naturalism. The critique of naturalism derives from its reliance on science and engineering skills displayed in stage craftsmanship of the West. Its spatial embodiment, the proscenium stage, was seen as the reproduction of 'natural' conditions on the stage through stage

properties and mechanics, scenes, edifices, lighting, etc. and perceived as a potential threat against the inherent focus on *abhinay* and *rasa*/experience of the Indian stage (SNA 2007, 27). In Opposition to this, the Seminar constructs a narrative of the continuous and unchanging tradition of Sanskrit theatre, a process in which theatre functions both as a site and a tool of an unbroken link between the pre-colonial past and the post-independence present. In this, language-specific folk theatres are seen as appropriations of the major tradition of classical theatre, providing a vital link between the past and the present. A unanimous challenge to engineering a national culture is the coexistence of philosophically and aesthetically varied conventions of theatre that needed to be ‘synthesised’ to produce a truly Indian dramatic tradition. For Mulk Raj Anand, the contradiction between the divergent practices of the present—the naturalism of the Western, proscenium-based theatrical activity, and the symbolism of the inherited Sanskrit theatre tradition and its survivals in rural India—is the primary crisis of the modern era. For him, no significant modern Indian tradition existed that could be fused organically with the indigenious imagination of drama or the European contemporary theatre (286-87). In his proposals for constituting a modern dramatic tradition, he discounts not only the techniques of the commercial stage, reducing it to “naturalistic imitationism”, but also the efforts of the ‘avant garde’ (IPTA) and its “high-browism” that only grafted certain techniques of the European theatre without any “thorough enquiry of the survivals of dramatic forms in our folk culture” (SNA Proceedings, 1956, 288-92). This use of ‘tradition’ and ‘history’ have to be seen as constructions of a (theatrical) past in the process of determining its future. It is the urban intelligentsia and emerging middle classes whose faith and allegiance to the values of the traditional Indian arts must be reinstated for the renewal of our integral tradition or recreation of a new tradition of dramatic art. In extracting the pre-

sumed core of Sanskrit drama from its specific context and planting it into the national canon as its most prized possession, the Seminar attempts to create ground between the forms that developed during the last century and the survivals from the past. In the debates on the requisite ‘form’ that would address the concerns of the newly-emergent nation, the Seminar points to a ‘synthesis’ between Sanskrit theatre’s symbolism and poetic realism, the Indian heritage of drama, and, the naturalism of Western theatre “devoid of its own organic sensibility, poetry and mechanical perfection” (Anand, Mulk Raj, 287). This synthesis was considered to be the precondition for the recreation of a new dramatic art. Aparna Dharwadker understands this as seeking a “middle ground between mere revivalism and imitative westernization, reconciling precolonial traditions with the sociocultural formations of a modern nation-state” (Dharwadker, 2005, 43). The necessary synthesis of the old and the new, the indigenous and the foreign, the rural and urban signalled a theatre practice that was neither stridently political, nor grossly commercial, as the previous theatre models proffered. In the process, the performing arts became a site of aesthetic and moral reform, moving them away from their role as sources of livelihood or of pleasure.

The central issue with regard to the question of a national theatre in the Drama Seminar was precisely its definition- would it be a centralised organisational body that would spearhead the theatre movement, a theatre aesthetic that would be the chosen form of the nation’s theatre or a modern urban theatre venue? The Seminar discussions seem to constantly refer to ‘national theatre’ as the latter, implying the material and infrastructural conditions of the existence of theatre, enabled and sustained by the state. Often, it also refers to the form/ aesthetic that this theatre would take and the historical past it would claim as its precedence and the claims to/in history it would make. The role of the state in funding, managing, and policy-making in theatre is a con-

tentious issue in the seminar. Several opinions cautioning against over- involvement of the state in cultural activity and the dangers of over-bureaucratisation of its institutions were expressed. In response to Mulk Raj Anand's presentation on bridging the gulf between indian and western drama through government patronage and its administrative machinery, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay argues,

Again and again I hear, not only in this seminar but also outside it, how nice it would be to have a ministry of culture. God Forbid, if such a thing happens there will be an end to all cultural activities in this country. I do not cherish such a hope [in it] because I know how the government machineries function. A ministry is a ministry and as such, it will have to go through so many formalities and procedures. (302)

Those present at the seminar vehemently dissociate national theatre from any centralised organisation owing to bureaucracy and political surveillance of art to argue against over-centralization of policy-making in culture. The fear of losing control over artistic production due to state intervention is echoed by many. Narain Kale's views on the nature and extent of governmental role in theatre outline the position of most experts present at the Seminar. He offers a clear distinction between governmental 'help' in the form of financial aid and supervision, and governmental 'control', limited by keeping planning and policy-making completely free and independent from it (233). Ahindra Chowdhuri argues that full control of government over theatre might overcome "bad management, shortage of capital and other such difficulties" but will compromise the quality of plays and professional standards of theatre productions by wiping out competition among rival theatres (90). The question of institutional autonomy became a focal point in all discussions of building theatrical infrastructure. On the one hand, there was a pressing need for the

welfare state, formulated on the lines of socialist ideals of development, to assume its role as the patron of the arts. The state was expected to provide financial support in the form of grants-in-aid and physical infrastructure of well-equipped theatres, training and research centres in every region. Intervention in such direct and pronounced ways was repeatedly sought by the Seminar delegates, urging the state to become an active agent in the crafting of a post-colonial ‘national culture’. On the other hand, the ownership of theatres and government investment in creating public infrastructure for its practice was opposed by many.

The Drama Seminar provides the institutional context for the desire for a national theatre, in the process, paving the way for the Akademi to expand and cement its scope of operation in the field. Even though the question of diversity, uneven development of a theatrical culture across the country, and diverse histories of new and surviving performance forms is repeatedly evoked in the Seminar, the overarching framework remains a state which is profoundly implicated in the provision of theatre which was regarded as a public service. Cultural practice and artistic resources were seen as productive resources of the nation that needed to be administered by the state, and the Akademi would be the institution that would foster that future.

***Natyashastra*: Reconciling the Classical, the Modern, and the National**

The *Natyashastra* finds its way into the Drama Seminar papers and discussions primarily as a way of ascertaining the relationship of the classical to the modern and the national. It is widely acknowledged by practitioners and scholars present at the Seminar that the classical Sanskrit drama, which can be traced back to the “highly developed and comprehensive conception of the drama of the ancient Hindus” and their religious texts, will have to be understood not merely

in its historic and social contexts but as a distinctly 'Indian style' of performance (39). Its significance is underlined in the context of colonial theatre practices and the advent of film that depend heavily upon extraneous mechanical aids employed in the Western theatre provided by modern innovations of science and engineering skills that dominate the stage, reducing the play and the actor to a secondary position in the theatre. The Indian tradition, on the other hand, was assumed to have been based on 'idealised techniques' of acting, depending on 'intrinsic' artistic resources, "laying the emphasis on the excellence of the art itself" (Proceedings, 27). As a source book for various aspects of Sanskrit theatre production, the proposals of the *Natyashastra* are therefore sought to be practiced, experimented with, and mastered in order to reconstruct authentic Indian play-texts and production styles lost to us due to prolonged history of colonialism and its attendant cultural dominance. The opening paper of the Seminar by the Sanskrit scholar and playwright, V. Raghavan, on the subject elaborately dwells on the divine origins of drama as found in the *Rigveda*; the mythical origins of Bharata's *Natyashastra*, creating a narrative of its Vedic history; and the religious-ritualistic context of performance. A large part of the paper draws upon dramatic and performance conventions, dramaturgy, and production techniques, emphasizing the all pervasiveness of the 'Natyashastric' tradition of Sanskrit theatre whose ultimate objective was spiritual awakening and " ... consolidation of spiritual, religious and moral culture among the people" (Raghavan 31). Raghavan interprets key words and ideas from *Natyashastra* to propose that the classically prescribed and once widely practiced tradition of Sanskrit theatre was sufficiently modern and immensely aesthetic. He dates Sanskrit drama much before the Greek, comprising a variety of dramatic forms not found in the latter, distinguished by both technique and ideology, making *Natyashastra* a treatise more complete and comprehensive than Aristotle's *Po-*

etics and Rhetorics (24). *Natyashastra* is seen to have ramified the art in a way that many centuries of growth have to be presupposed. This long, almost historically indeterminate, period of growth of Sanskrit drama, works at placing it credibly in the unbroken stream of Indian culture, eliding the social implications of Sanskrit drama behind the guise of religious, mystical stories. In explaining the historical importance of Sanskrit theatre, Raghavan states that, “together with recitation of the epics, the drama has all through Indian history borne the burden of large-scale adult education among the masses” (31). Notwithstanding the effectiveness of drama in educating the masses given its live, immediate, and intimate possibilities, the fact that Sanskrit was only known and spoken by a few is completely omitted. What is also absent from Raghavan's appraisal of Sanskrit theatre is the fact of its aristocratic and upper caste/class patronage, limiting access to those who could learn the language, perform in, or witness performances in temples and courts. The pedagogic role of drama is not understood as contributing towards the recognition and critique of social and cultural ills emanating from the strictures of religious orthodoxy and the caste systems but in the abstract and generalized sense that, “the art as a whole would have beneficial and educative effect on the public” (31). Amongst the reasons enumerated for its decline, are primarily, the ‘literary and linguistic’ developments, the rise of middle and modern Indo-Aryan languages, that led to a “loss of personnel who were the medium of their [of Sanskrit language and drama] preservation” (ibid). The growth of regional language theatres that “retained the theme and technique of the Sanskrit drama but used the local language, making Sanskrit originals superfluous” leads Raghavan to conclude that,

Sanskrit drama's decay cannot be attributed to its failure to reflect society and life, for it was not superseded by any dramatic efflorescence in local languages which developed

that character. In fact, in drama, the achievement of the ancient Indian genius in Sanskrit is yet to be excelled by any other Indian language (32)

Raghavan's presentation makes a significant historiographical move, asserting the primacy and antiquity of Sanskrit theatre alongside its transcendence and relevance to the national project. It establishes that no other theatrical tradition, comparable in aesthetic style, technique, or scale had developed in the country since the demise of Sanskrit theatre. This view delegitimizes the development of vernacular indigenous traditions of performance that resulted from the social, political, and cultural transformations, entirely effacing the co-existence of non-religious secular theatre traditions across languages. Raghavan claims to see in all the surviving indigenous provincial forms, not only in the country but also in the rest of the Eastern world where Indian culture spread, the conventions of performance based on the 'Natyashastric' tradition—the stylised techniques of the integrated arts of poetry, music, and dance—that characterise the dance drama style of Kalidasa and Harsha (33). The usefulness of Sanskrit theatre in building drama and theatre anew is a debated question in the Seminar. There are differing views of how and to what extent Sanskrit theatre might become a model for modern theatre. Amidst the often revivalist tenor of the discussions on the *Natyashastra* are also the voices of modernists like Ebrahim Alkazi, Mulk Raj Anand, Balraj Sahni and Adya Rangacharya who argue against any notion of authenticity with respect to classical traditions; stress the need for research of Sanskrit drama and its production styles forwarding another rationale for setting up of the National School of Drama. They echo a concern with theatrical contemporaneity that is alert to cultural and social contexts of the present. In Raghavan's views on the subject,

...if we are to evolve a distinct Indian style based on an idealised technique which

would depend more on intrinsic artistic resources rather than on the external mechanical aids, and would not like our stage to be a mere imitation of the Western theatre, we have to study Bharata and Kālidāsa intimately [...]. if we do so, in one effort we will be resurrecting the three arts— dance, drama and music (32)

The extensive study of Sanskrit texts and theatre techniques was expected to contribute towards the revival and resurrection of the performance traditions surviving in different parts of India. There is a pointed focus on research of Sanskrit drama and theatre conventions in universities and staging theatre productions “in exactly the way they used to be played in the past” in order to retrieve the authentic essence of the ancient tradition (E. Alkazi, 38). Ahindra Chowdhuri replicates this experiment, much like the Western parallel—“producing a Shakespeare play as Shakespeare himself used to produce” (39). On the question of how this was to be undertaken, there are no concrete offerings but only sweeping generalisations like using “the intrinsic artistic resources” and the spiritual-moral attributes of theatre, because there is no actual evidence about how Sanskrit drama was practically enacted on stage (39). The continuous reference to *Nāṭyaśāstra* in this process of reconstruction enabled the imagined cultural and theatrical continuity with a distanced and idealised past such that the present could evidence perpetuity of the tradition with the treatise itself (Shah, 2002, 130).

This kind of movement originated as an essential part of the efforts to build up a 'national' theatre that would restore to the nationalist postcolonial imaginary what seemed to have been interrupted by colonialism. It was based on the revitalization of the hitherto neglected ‘traditional’ performing arts that were seen to embody a rich socio-cultural heritage, something that could not be affected without the active intervention of the state and its functionaries. The Vice-Chair-

man, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay proposed that, "if there are any organizations carrying out experiments in drama, general or classical, they should be encouraged with economic and material aid. There may be one or two organizations which will do experiments in classical drama ... it is useful to establish such exclusive playhouses for traditional or classical drama [too]" (Drama Seminar 1956, 2007, 43). Ahindra Chowdhuri links the creation of a distinct Indian style of theatre to the need for a national theatre with "ample money and official backing", whose interests and capacity to experiment would not be limited to that of the commercial or amateur stage (39). Raghavan's position on reviving and reconstructing Sanskrit tradition in performing arts in the broadest sense, with folk forms as the basis on which to begin a national re-constitution of culture, to be completed with the appropriation of dance and drama traditions such as *Kathak*, *Bharatnatyam*, *Kathakali* and *Koodiyattam*, sets the agenda and tone towards an anti-modern stance reflected right through the Seminar and finds space in the list of recommendations that are made at the very end. Moreover, the issue of Sanskrit dramatic texts and conventions, their aesthetic appeal and contemporary relevance find currency with those flagging the concept of a 'national theatre'. The classical Sanskrit theatre is the source of aesthetic and cultural continuities from the past that contain the present in its cultural-nationalist context.

The Construction of Folk

The Drama Seminar is the pivotal moment of the creation of the categories of the 'classical' and the 'folk' to define a rich cultural past and heritage of the nation and edifying into legitimate terms of discourse of theatre for a long time to come. The distinction between 'classical' and 'folk' forms were both inventions of the hierarchy and culture of the ruling classes preoccupied with the idea of tradition and represents hegemonic values of nationhood. Here the former

signalled the pure 'Natyashastric' Sanskrit theatre tradition, and the latter denoted the rural, pre-modern forms linked to 'common people' or 'peasants', a notion that was later glorified by IPTA and used in conjunction with non-urban performance forms. Much like the category of the 'classical' was an orientalist construction that valorised the Sanskritic forms over and above the contemporary culture of the natives, 'folk' was an 'urban construction' that located the remnants of Sanskrit drama within the indigenous performance traditions. The notion that 'tradition' is a recoverable, unmediated cultural essence is a postcolonial invention, much like the invention of the nation itself (Bharucha, 1992, 251). The search for an 'authentic' Indian theatre tradition, symbolic of a pristine pre-colonial past, or its possible revival, is in fact, the invention of a national myth that elides the organic processes of transformation of traditional repertoires over time. In the Drama Seminar papers and discussions, it is the invention of a stable and unchanging 'folk' theatre upon which claims of an authentic and pure cultural tradition are made. Arguing against this limited and limiting view, Bharucha clarifies that folk and indigenous theatre "had already been mediated by the colonial machinery of the nineteenth century theatre, the conventions and stage tricks derived from the pantomimes and historical extravaganzas of the English Victorian stage' just as the western influences and conventions were thoroughly indigenized through music, song, color, pathos, melodrama and histrionic delivery (1989, 1907).

In a seminar claiming to represent the diverse folk culture of the nation, only two 'Folk theatre' forms are discussed in some detail- the popular folk drama of Gujarat, *Bhavai* and Hindi folk theatre that are presented in separate papers at the seminar. Yet, irrefutable attention is paid to the narrative of the dismal state of vernacular theatres, whose preservation is considered crucial to the sustenance of the myth of a continuous tradition. While the question of an appropriate

theatrical form to represent the nation and the material conditions of its existence occupy centre stage in the Drama Seminar discussions, it is the ‘traditional’ that forms the axis around which the nation’s paradoxical desire for modernity is played out— with legitimisation of modern institutions and governance of culture, matched by the contradictory search for a glorious and immortal cultural past. The recurring narrative of their present degeneration and decay is a crisis expressed with a sense of urgency. Their loss of authenticity, their characteristic “innocence” and eventual malfeasance is ascribed not only to the changed contexts of patronage but more assertively to the growing popularity and demand for commercial theatre. While the history of regional theatres including the crisis of traditional and folk theatre are articulated in as many as thirteen papers across vernacular language theatres, the discussions and recommendation for the future remain bereft of any overarching philosophy or mandate towards sustenance of the forms or their practitioners. Folk theatre and its formalistic elements remain a resource to be shaped, developed, and put to use in the theatre of the future. For this they must be fully known and identified, documented and recorded in their “pure form”.

The notion of the Sanskrit drama as potentially constituting the repertoire of a distinctly Indian genius in arts, of which the folk theatres are only derivative and decadent survivals, sets up the hierarchy between classical Sanskrit and vernacular language theatres such that it isolates the latter as a genre most in need of preservation, promotion, and study. On the one hand, it valorises the Sanskrit theatre as a timeless fixed category, while on the other, subsuming all possible potentialities of folk theatre in their choice of style, dynamism, participation, and social critique, awaiting revival. But the boundaries of the folk and classical within the Seminar discussions are at best fuzzy. In the discussion on *Kuchipudi Bhagavatam*, the dance drama of Andhra Pradesh,

Nataraj Ramakrishna traces a somewhat unusual history of revival and recuperation of the form from its tribal antecedent, *Kuravanji*, and the secular variant, *Yakshagana* by the Brahmin priests of Kuchipudi to as late as the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries, leading B. Kanakalingeswara Rao to assert that,

Kuchipudi drama is no mere folk drama. It is both folk and classical. The classical ones were given a form by a saint named Sidhananda who came from Maharashtra. The saint took some elements from the folk forms and rendered them into a new form adopting the principles of the *Natyashastra*. (2007, 279)

The process of sanskritization, much like in *Bharatanatyam*, is modelled on the Sanskrit theatre, incorporating elements from the *Natyashastra*—an elaborate narrative with four kinds of *abhinaya* (acting) and *nritya* (pure dance), that are arguably indicators of its growing sophistication. This narrative also contrasts with the widely accepted story of degeneration of the classical forms into the popular/folk derivatives, reinforcing the latter as corrupted off-shoots of the once glorious Sanskrit tradition. What it completely ignores are the alterations made to the traditional *Kuchipudi*, in “invoking the past adapted to suit the needs of an infatuation with modernity” that erased some of the distinctive features of the tradition, most specifically the modalities of female impersonation characteristic to the traditional form, “reducing its significance from the religious, sublime, and ecstatic to a choreographic stage art” (Shah: 2002, 134). This re-conception of the *Bhagavatam* from the folk/tribal as the ‘classical’ works to affirm the purity and timelessness of temple-based forms, as opposed to the transient and easily corruptible nature of ‘folk’ forms located in other non-ritualistic and secular spaces. Despite the recent and contentious classification of folk and classical, the Seminar papers set the tone for and establish the clear distinction be-

tween the primordial Sanskrit theatre and the secondary, vernacular and folk forms representing an aesthetic and cultural regression from the past to the present. It is in this connection that the importance of folk forms of drama and vernacular theatre is articulated—they are seen as vestiges of a once flourishing classical theatre. As Dina Pathak suggests,

From a study of our ancient Sanskrit drama and theatre, we are passing on to the popular folk-drama where perhaps the remnants and relics of the past may be discovered; and whatever their present condition, but there only, perhaps, lies that golden key to the treasure house of our immortal cultural heritage. (180)

The link between the classical Sanskrit stage and the provincial forms of the vernacular are thus determined; the (nationalist) desire to approximate the former is to be realised through using the artistic resource of the latter. Any move towards delineating a credible Indian aesthetic of our ‘integral tradition’ must journey back to the linguistic, stylistic, and formalistic source—the Sanskrit theatre. Mulk Raj Anand’s statement underlines the relationship of the now lost classical tradition to the surviving folk forms in various regions of India. He suggests that it is through,

a coordinated study and research, beginning at the unadulterated folk forms and gradually extending to the sophisticated forms, keeping in view Dr. Raghavan’s thesis, we may be able to get to know what exactly happened (36)

If arguments of the primacy of Sanskrit drama and its the basis for its theory and practice, the *Natyashastra*, generate the polarities of the classical and the folk in the aforementioned papers, Suresh Awasthi’s paper on Hindi folk theatre offers an additional set of polarity between the folk and the modern. The modernising attitude towards the ‘folk’ is unmissable, when he asserts that, like the Sanskrit tradition, it is possible to locate the “structures and stage conventions” in folk

drama, albeit, “only different from the modern formal closed theatres” (143). To achieve this, he prescribes taking scientific equipment and modern investigational techniques to the villages and collecting material from “first hand sources”, and following the same course and principles as in the case of literary drama for the evaluation and analysis of this material (145). While it does not hurt that his “specific folk theatre idea” comprises a dynamic character that “grows and changes with the changing social perspective and cultural content, thereby giving birth to new practices and conventions, enlarging and readjusting the old ones...”, his insistence on rehabilitation and reorganization of folk drama is premised on the belief that the “pure and authentic” style of the folk drama is lost, with current practices having become ineffective and outmoded (ibid). Awasthi’s call towards the reshaping and revitalizing of the decaying dramatic elements by a planned programme of archiving and recording resonates with colonial ethnographic exercises of documenting native cultures and their practices. Sachin Sengupta in his speech as the seminar director marks a resolute history of folk practices of the “unlettered and uneducated village bards” and their art and rituals as appropriations of Sanskrit language and culture (and the languages of several conquerors)(18-19). The imagination of the artist as “poor and illiterate”, a natural repository of creative skill such that he could easily recreate ideas into realities of life is essentialized and made a symbol through which the SNA’s intervention in theatre and its future is legitimized (ibid). The celebration of the ‘artisan’ as the ‘authentic’ ‘Indian’ subject, preconditioned to perform and create art in pure and undiluted forms removes art practices from the domain of knowledge production. Dina Pathak’s paper on *Bhavai* offers preservation through studying of the rarely transmitted *Bhavai* texts and eliminating from them sections that are ill-composed, crude and vulgar, the “spurious interpolations” composed by persons of inferior merit

(181). The suggestions made towards extending support to *Bhavai* included provisioning for research of the conventions of the forms and its scripts as well as material support to the *Bhavai* artists and a training school for the growing generation of the *Naiks* (Bhavai performing community). The filming and recording of the history of *Bhavai* was considered a specialised task undertaken with an anthropological understanding and outsourced to a properly appointed committee.

It is not the folk artists whose modernisation, livelihood, or sustenance that the SNA policy of recording, archiving, and preserving of forms was geared towards. Rather, as Alkazi points in his critique of the conservationist attitude of the Seminar towards the folk, that their education and urbanisation would result in them jettisoning the art of their forefathers (2007, 182). The efforts of filming and recording them were to be the prime strategies through which the folk and indigenous are returned to their pure, puritanical, and authentic form, captured and retained within the annals of the past and therefore destined to remain outside of the state's framework of progress and modernity. Pathak asserts that "the modernization of Bhavai means its death" , which was to be preserved and used to lend vitality to the forms of arts that the modern theatre practitioner was seeking to cultivate (181-2). In commending Dina Pathak's efforts at reviving *Bhavai* and the intentions of the wider project of revitalisation of folk forms, Balraj Sahni clarifies that, " ... to revitalise [her] own art by borrowing from the Bhavai or to help the evolution of a form which would contain in it the vitality of a Bhavai and as much of its indigenous character as the sophisticated audiences would be able to appreciate" (183). These presentations document the modern artist's fascination for particular techniques of folk theatre rather than a total view of traditions in their context. They also foresee SNA sponsored 'Theatre of the Roots', the theatre

movement that advocated for modern urban practitioners to search for authentic cultural roots in indigenous traditions in the following decade, of which Awasthi himself became a key ideologue and administrator. As tradition makes its way into the national imagination to give it the gloss of authenticity and purity, the folk who embody and perform the culture, remain curiously outside the discourse of theatre, and away from popular and paying contexts of performance consumption.

As the previous chapter demonstrates, SNA's efforts at defining the classical through the institution of awards and recognition had been underway since its inception a few years ago. Folk, on the other hand, had been part of the nation's visual aesthetic from before, displayed routinely in the Republic Day parades. Both the folk and the classical were constructions of the nineteenth century anthropological discourse of culture. Their prominence as categories defining forms of performance in post-colonial India point to their continued fetishisation and exotification by the nation-state. Interestingly, while offering a critique of the spectacular displays of folk and indigenous art forms in state-sponsored annual extravaganzas such as the Republic Day parades and folk dance festivals, the Seminar discussants do not find problematic either the appropriation of the rural forms and their sensuousness for the pleasure of the urban public nor its curation alongside the nation's military displays in the service of a militant nationalism. Balwant Gargi's remarks on the subject indicate the widely held lopsided view of the folk as embodying a pure and uncontaminated indigeneity that must be preserved at all costs.

... we find that every year tons of money are being spent on the Republic Day to give the public a taste of folk arts which happen to be no art at all. If money may be had for those *tamashas*, why could it not be found to save forms like Kuchipudi and Bhavai. I remember

to have seen a sort of hopelessly muddled style of Kuchipudi at one of the celebrations... I was thinking why that rotten stuff was displayed at the Republic Day celebrations. Who was responsible for the importation of the spurious stuff which was crude, vulgar and which gave out a martial note? (Gargi, 279)

Gargi finds government spending on the Republic Day showcases that aim to give the “public” a “taste” of “folk” arts incommensurable with the lack of financial support to save forms like *Kuchipudi* and *Bhavai*. What is remarkable is the assumption that the versions of the forms on display are not only deceptive and lacking authenticity, they do not qualify as art at all.

Institutionalising Professional and Amateur Theatre

The question of developing a professional theatre is tied intricately to the ideological choices of form and the key role that the state would play in creating physical infrastructure conducive for theatre practice. In the discussion following his presentation titled ‘Professional Theatre in the Western Region’, Narain Kale contends that “there exists not a single permanent playhouse in Bombay and for that matter in the whole of the western region where a dramatic performance could be given” (234). His claims of the absence of professional activity in the western region resonate with Balraj Sahni who claims that there is hardly any professional theatre activity in the country except in the big cities of Madras, Delhi, Calcutta, or Bombay (Sahni 305). The proclaimed absence of such a professional theatre forms the ground for the imagination of a state-sponsored modern theatre which, though professional, would be “thoroughly national and popular in character” (Kale, 232). In its form, it would break away from the commercial activity of the past (read Victorian-inspired professional theatre companies) that could no longer serve as a viable model for the new institutionalised set-up for theatre. He creates a distinction between

professional theatre of the past, which was only a commercial activity with the aim to amuse and entertain and the new ‘profession of the theatre’ that will disseminate culture and informal education in an entertaining way—“using indigenous material and laying its foundations upon our national traditions” (ibid). It is important to note that the ‘modern’ theatre became ‘professional’ only in the second half of the nineteenth century and the traveling theatre companies had an important role in professionalising the theatre. On the other hand, the ‘folk theatre’ had not yet become fashionable or fully secularised and so the models of ‘professionalism’ in theatre continued to be European. Over the years, this ‘professionalism’, which enabled artists to earn a living from theatre, became associated with ‘commercialism’ which attracted intense criticism at the Seminar. For the experts in the Drama Seminar, ‘professionalism’ meant being ‘serious’ about theatre, not earning a livelihood through it. It equally implied that the space for regular theatre performances, a stage and an auditorium, would be the condition for professional theatre to emerge and sustain. The discussions on the role of professional theatre and of professionals therein are contrasted with that of the amateur. The Seminar proclaimed that the responsibility of building a tradition of theatre lays squarely on the former, who must be “a class of people who will be wholly and solely devoted to the cause of theatre for ensuring its progress and maintaining its prestige” (ibid). The latter were seen as those whose sustained efforts, vitality, and continued experimentation will ensure that the “movement for a national theatre can be ushered in and in which the professional stage can function again on artistic lines” (324). While the contribution of amateur theatre, often associated with educational institutions, clubs, and community centres located across the country, towards instilling creative energy in theatre and keeping theatre activity alive in the absence of the professional stage, were acknowledged, it was agreed that the task of

building a theatrical tradition lay in the hands of professionals dedicated to the cause of drama (238). What the discussions make amply clear is the dependence of one upon the other—professional theatre may only be rescued by creating conditions that are conducive for amateur practice on which the former depended. The desire for a modern theatre is a call for professional theatre for which the state would have to play the role of patron and benefactor by creating a system of sustained and liberal aid.

The two key legislative issues formed the centre of criticism of the role of the state with regard to the development of dramatic activity, particularly professional theatre in the Drama Seminar discussions. These are the Dramatic Performances Act, 1876 and the Entertainment Tax levied on theatre, both seen concertedly as “outdated restrictions in the growth of Drama” and continued influence of colonial forms of state power and control over public culture—the first through censoring contentious matter and the second through levying taxes on an already pressured professional sector. They date back to the British rule in India and underscore the colonial history of viewing theatre and performance as potent tools that could be used against the state, its policies, and politics. Enacted just before the official transfer of power from the East India Company to the Crown, Dramatic Performances Censorship Act (DPA) performed the function of regulating public drama/theatre performances that expressed adversarial views on the colonial state, inviting increasingly widespread censorship, and suppression by the colonial government over the next five decades. As the previous chapter demonstrates, the passage of DPA offers crucial insights into the cultural policy of the colonial state and the response it generated in the nationalist struggle against British rule in India. Similarly, the levy of entertainment tax on theatre performances in British India was intended to impede the professional success of indigenous the-

atre companies. It was partly based on the spread and sweep of theatre, the large gatherings it attracted and the possibility it offered for public rebellion against the colonial state to be sparked. The underlying messages of freedom and self-rule that popular theatre relayed in the context of the burgeoning nationalist movement of the late nineteenth century only exacerbated this danger. The Drama Seminar discussions document these instruments of state powers as impediments in the growth of drama. In its formal recommendations, the Drama Seminar proceedings urge the government to immediately repeal the DPA and exempt theatre, both amateur and professional, from the entertainment tax. It is interesting to note that in regions with a historically recognised culture of professional theatre like Bengal, professional theatre had already established credentials of anti-colonial and nationalist leanings and had been exempt from entertainment tax. On the other hand, it was the amateur and semi-professional theatre that had to continue paying to perform.

With respect to entertainment tax, the seminar discussants made a distinction between drama as a 'serious nation-building cultural activity' that must be protected and promoted, and other forms of commercial entertainment such as the film and urban popular theatre. The exemption from entertainment tax was sought from the state governments for the former while the latter, considered morally and culturally bankrupt, necessitated forms of governmental controls including tax. The reservation on abolishing entertainment tax can be seen as a way in which state governments could keep commercial theatre under check. The grounds for the antagonism expressed towards popular commercial theatre in the Seminar discussions are many: firstly, it is decried for being of 'western' import, inspired by Victorian theatre aesthetics and deemed imitative, inauthentic, and serving only to consolidate European culture; secondly, it was seen to embody

and propagate virtues and aesthetics that were far removed from the great Indian ‘Natyashastric’ tradition; thirdly, the role of drama for the purpose of mere entertainment and box office collections in commercial theatre did not align with the pedagogic role it was meant to serve in contemporary national life. Kale rationalises taxing commercial theatre enterprises by saying that:

I believe that the demand for the total abolition of Entertainment Tax is neither reasonable nor tenable. [...] When a company makes a profit out of the shows it gives, why will it not pay to the government? (237)

Kale also argues for government subsidies and loans at low rates of interest for constructing theatres all over the country, managed by the community and administered by trained professional executives, even as he asserts the need to control and tax professional theatre activity. It is not a coincidence that in states with successful ‘professional/commercial theatre companies’ particularly Bombay and Gujarat (of which Kale also spoke of in some detail), continue to record some of the highest entertainment tax rates.

Drama Seminar and Its Exclusions

Theatre historians (Anita Cherian, 2007; Vasudha Dalmia, 2008; and Rustom Bharucha, 1989) emphasise the exclusions and silences of the report and concur that two significant historical moments of Indian theatre are carefully ignored in the Seminar discussions. Firstly, the contributions of the left-oriented progressive theatre, the first nation-wide anti-colonial theatre movement, IPTA, and secondly, the large scale adaptations of European realist plays into popular idioms by the Parsi theatre companies. These studies make a useful contribution by focussing attention to the national myths about modernity—the so far neglected theatrical interventions of the progressive theatre of mid-twentieth century that aligned itself with international models of

peasant and working class solidarity, and, the innovations of technique, spectacle, scale, and commerce made by the commercial theatre of the early twentieth century. These studies also see the report as propounding and enhancing the myth that modernity in the arts in India was vehicled through state mediation by the enlightened post-independence Nehru administration. Bharucha argues that the report performs a “historical amnesia about the prodigious production of art that survived and resisted colonial rule through various traditions of dissent, strategy, and sheer creative brilliance” (1992, 1669). Aparna Dharwadker notes that the 1956 Drama Seminar “marks a symbolic end to the theatre movement of the 1940s...”, effectively re-orienting the cultural politics that disassociated theatre from the progressive political programme of IPTA and linking it with the nation’s remote and proximate cultural past (2005, 37). The Seminar, therefore, considers the performing arts as a source of spiritual wealth in tune with religious rites and rituals, a wholly pre-modern understanding of arts and their role in the creation of subjectivity. The arguments of Indian spiritual and divine dispensation despite the corrupting influences of the British rule trump over complex intermixing of cultural forms and interpolations of history, thereby affecting the exclusion of select forms from the narrative of Indian theatre.

This section aims to move further to argue that both the IPTA and the commercial theatre traditions (of which the Parsi theatre was the forerunner) are not excluded from the report, rather form an oppositional force against which a new theatrical modernity is mediated and managed by the nation-state. Further, I argue that these acts of exclusion from the representative history of Indian theatre and the rejection of the political and the hybrid-popular as historically successful models to borrow from or build the theatre of the future upon, is not a contrivance of the Drama Seminar but rather, a continuation of nineteenth century colonial and nationalist cultural dis-

course and theatre historiography. The concept of a homogenous national culture, of “consensual and contiguous transmission of traditions”, such as that being sought at the First Drama Seminar, can only be achieved “through the death, literal and figurative, of the complex interweaving of history, and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood” (Bhabha, 2004, 7).

Histories on modern Indian theatre by (Kapur, 1993, 2004; Hansen, 2004; Somnath Gupta, 2001; Sengupta, 2014) characterise the Parsi theatre as the first modern professional theatre to emerge as a result of the encounter between European theatre and indigenous forms of performance. Hybridity, as a concept and site that encapsulated the production of ambivalent and ‘mixed’ forms of identity and cultural production, defines this popular and characteristically colonial form of theatre. Its literary and linguistic sources ranged from European as well as Sanskrit classics, to episodes from Hindu epics, *Puranas*, as well as Mughal historicals, borrowing translating and adapting them into first Marathi, Gujarati, and Parsi languages and eventually into Urdu and Hindustani. It drew freely from melodrama, spectacle, and magic created through elaborate scenery and an illusionistic stage picture as well as realist narratives framed through the proscenium arch that created distance and realist illusion, often playfully broken to interact and interpellate the audiences. Other elements included declamatory delivery of dialogue along with the use of folk dance and music performed in front of diverse and differentiated audiences. The performative and technological means deployed by the Parsi theatre, its deference to the popular and the entrepreneurial, produced a uniquely hybrid aesthetic and theatricality, as well as a theatrical cosmopolitanism uniquely modern and Indian. Cherian argues that as an institutional idiom, Parsi theatre was “resistant to the rationalities of the ‘normal’ and the ‘sensible’”- qualities that the colonial state had tried so strenuously to inculcate in the native populations, through

the imposition of the “English Book” and “the dislocations of the authoritative text” (2007, 22-26). The interpolations to and performative liberties in the source text, which were often iconic European and Sanskrit plays, the unhinging of the theatrical text from the authorial text, and the theatre from the institutionalisation of the classical literary canon of the English education system actively countered the colonial, social, and institutional order, particularly the pedagogic means by which colonial difference and subordination was sought (ibid). The critique of Parsi theatre, its performative strategies, and inherent allegiance to cultural diversity and difference was not an invention of the First Drama Seminar Report. This process had been actively underway since the late nineteenth century— assertions of a national theatrical tradition in the Hindi-speaking region as well as in the celebrated institution of public theatre in Bengal, even though the techniques of the Parsi theatre and modern innovations for which it was considered foreign, had already come to be incorporated into the theatre of the times⁴⁴. The invention of ‘modern Hindi drama’, pioneered by the interventions of Bhartendu Harishchandra⁴⁵ was launched in opposition to the European models of theatre and the corruptions of the commercial stage, itself an outcome of the colonial Indologist’s rediscovery and valorisation of Sanskrit literary and dramatic traditions. Interestingly, as Kathryn Hansen notes, the conventions and criteria of genuine modern dramatic text were formalised by Bhartendu himself in his own dramatic writing, building upon the rules of Sanskrit drama and the European stage, rejecting pre-existing Braj Bhasha

⁴⁴ For example: the integration of technological innovations like the printing press that aided effectively communicating information in the form of printed notes, for which Sanskrit initiatory conventions had been used thus far.

⁴⁵ The new aesthetic of drama that his essays and plays expressed, while drawing upon the old and integrating the new, did not shy away from expressing loyalty to the ruling power, the fair dispensation of justice during the reign of Queen Victoria, and often seeking financial support and good wishes from the colonial government. The tradition was modified to meet the needs of the times for the purpose of creating a socially correct and politically progressive theatre.

dramas and folk theatre forms, rejected for being mere poetry or categorically 'undramatic' (1989, 86-88). As scholars of Hindi theatre note, this theatre was not entirely removed from the visual and performative means of the Parsi theatre, taking recourse to popular forms and popular music and using them as framing devices for contemporary issues, repeated change of scenes and painted backdrop, integrating western categories of tragedy, comedy and tragi-comedy (Dalmia, 35-36). This history of the Hindi theatre and its accommodative, even appreciative attitude towards the colonial administration finds no mention in the paper on Hindi theatre by J. C. Mathur in the Seminar (2007, 121-135). Narain Kale in his paper titled 'The Professional Theatre in the Western Region', rehearses the history of modern Marathi theatre by drawing attention to its other, the Western inspired Gujarati-Urdu stage, Kannada theatre, and the Parsi theatre practiced in the western region until the 1920s and finds it lacking in literary merit, social significance, or aesthetic values. Driven by the commercial superstructure that determined the interpolations of music and the extravagance of spectacle, pageantry, and costumes, this theatre, it is claimed, failed to find roots in the soil and had perished on account of its inherent faults —“in their enthusiasm for the spectacular and the popular, they often disregarded all canons of art and indulged in gross anachronisms” (Kale 223). This selective historical narration, achieved by ironing out the complexities and inconsistencies of the national past that intervene in the unifying and totalising myths of a coherent national culture, became the defining mark of the First Drama Seminar Report. The chapters on Bengali theatre, the only language theatre that merits three paper presentations at the seminar, also exhibit similar attempts at homogenising theatre history by erasing the antagonism of the *bhadralok* patronised Bengali theatre towards the professional theatre and its commercial inclinations (Cherian, 20). The histories of regional theatres

in the Drama Seminar Report are replete with exclusions that efface complex and contradictory histories, especially those that belie the middle class's complacency and participation in the colonial project.

As the previous section demonstrates, the history of the critique of the popular and hybrid in theatrical discourse dates as far back as the late nineteenth century with Bhartendu's assertions of a national theatre and was later incorporated into the programmes of the IPTA. Cherian equates the critique of Parsi theatre in the Seminar with, "an acceptance of the regulations of colonial policy, and its perpetuation of post colonial policies" (2007, 26). I would further argue that given the historical basis of colonial policies in the Orientalist philosophy, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, the exclusion of the popular from the Akademi's agenda of defining a modern theatre tradition in the Seminar also corresponds to the Seminar's endorsement of the principles of colonial differentiation that led to apathy and neglect of indigenous culture. The First Drama Seminar Report's delineation of a future national theatre precludes the history of professionalisation and innovation of the Parsi theatre and performs the continuation of exclusions of the colonial and nationalist cultural discourse and historiography. While the exclusion of the recent history of the politically conscious theatre of the 1940s that fomented as a grassroots cultural movement in response to anti-fascist and anti-imperial temperament of the time as well as the popular Parsi theatre was based on the theatre's difficult relationship to the state—IPTA for its political sharpness and popular Parsi theatre for its history of hybridity, popular entertainment, and commercial success—both equally unqualified as legitimate models for a modern national culture built on the basis of a 'national consensus' forged by an urban middle-class intelligentsia. The former is especially interesting since many theatre practitioners, scholars and writers present

at the Seminar had been closely associated with the IPTA, having contributed artistically and politically to its cause. Mulk Raj Anand, Sachin Sengupta, Balraj Sahni, Shambhu Mitra, and Dina Gandhi who were its products underlined the early work of the IPTA, its artistic vigour, inventiveness, and its political critique of culture in their presentations⁴⁶, yet the Seminar does not offer any systematic or substantive analysis of IPTA's artistic practice, Parsi theatre's organisational/ technological innovations nor any conclusive understanding of their eventual decline.

As the transfer of power from the colonial elite to the native elite took shape, the representational discourse of the colonial state continued well into the post-colonial state's national life. As Franz Fanon's thesis on the workings of the bourgeois nationalists reminds us, the latter's interest and intention is not in transforming the nation, but only in restructuring the prevailing social order in order to fulfil its 'historic mission' of constituting the national middle class as functionaries of the nation (2004, 98-101). The constitution of the Drama Seminar, its assembly of experts, organisation of topics, debates, and discussions belie the institutional claims of representativeness. The Seminar does not apportion any dedicated discussion on the Parsi theatre, or include a single paper presentation that may have invested dedicated effort in examining the complex history of the commercial stage and debating the historiographical blindspots involved.

⁴⁶ A reference to the IPTA is found in the paper on 'Punjabi Drama in Theatre' as a source of inspiration and the point of revival of a 'qualitatively new era on the Indian stage' marking "a turn to folk form to express the reality of people's life and struggles and thus create a vital and truly Indian theatre movement..." (Sanyal and Bhatia., 2007, 152). The paper also points to the arrival of the term 'folk', having been given official sanction in its repeated use in the Seminar. In the context of Punjabi theatre, the IPTA's use of 'folk' that became emblematic of reclaiming lost heritage and authentic history, propelled a re-understanding of indigenous forms and synthesized the prevalent folk heritage in music, mime and rhythm, dance and acting (in the case of Punjab the mime-dance Bhangra and its feminine variety Gida) kick-starting the peasant theatre groups under the auspices of Kisan Sabha in rural Punjab as well as the Women's Drama League in Lahore that developed the 'operetta' or the 'pareta', an all women's open-air opera on the lines of the Punjabi folk form that was performed in villages, using social issues and current political issues as their themes. Sanyal and Bhatia discuss IPTA's influence on the Punjabi drama through their performance of the ballet *India Immortal* and its role in its resurgence in the post partition period by staging Balwant Gargi's plays, *Biswedat* and *Rising of the Moon*, performed in 1949 in Delhi, as well as the refinement of the Punjabi opera in Mohan Singh Mahir's play, *Peace*, done in collaboration with the Delhi IPTA in 1949— facilitating, in their words "the resurgence of new groupings and a great increase in dramatic activity" (2007, 154-55).

The discussions on the language theatres only allude to the popular theatre tangentially as its unscrupulous other, symbolising moral and social degeneration and a threat to the pure classical traditions as well as the folk, the derivative vernacular forms of theatre. It is neither acknowledged for its professional success, its “transnational and translational sense of hybridity”, nor for its contribution of keeping alive and sustaining community of actors, playwrights, musicians, and technicians recruited or hired on contracts, paying them regular salaries and training them in newer skills as the professional stage demanded (Bhabha, 2004, 7).

Evaluating Seminar Recommendations

One of the foremost recommendations of the Drama Seminar was the repealing of the DPA of 1876 and exemption from the Entertainment Tax levied by the state governments on all theatre activity, considered fundamental to creating free, unrestricted and enabling conditions for the efflorescence of the arts. The committee entrusted with the implementation of the Drama Seminar recommendations in its report to the Executive Board of the Akademi passed a resolution to repeal the DPA of 1876, urging the state governments to “take similar steps so that drama which is much more than entertainment and which in the present conditions needs special incentives should develop and prosper” (SNA, 2007, 404) . While SNA’s recommendations with regard to both these issues of immediate concern are articulated with a sense of urgent necessity, their implementation has met with uneven success even after fifty-five years since the Drama Seminar. The division of matters of policy and governance into union, state, and concurrent lists that are legislated upon by the centre, region and ‘centre overruling the state’ respectively, is determined by India’s unique federal structure that despite a strong bias towards centralisation of power, has acquiesced cultural legislation to the domain of the states rather than the centre. Both

the Entertainment Tax and DPA 1876 being ‘state subjects’ fall in the purview of state legislation, undercutting the implementation of the Drama Seminar recommendations. Central government bound by federal structure can only recommend the repulsion and exemption of items that fall in the state list, but cannot enforce it. The legitimacy and practice of DPA has continued to play out differently in every state in keeping with the social, political, and theatre histories of the region⁴⁷. Balraj Sahni laments the situation thus,

In the British days, a play could be submitted to the censor a week before the day of performance. Now, in Bombay at least, it has to be submitted a month in advance. In the British days, a single copy was to be submitted, now no less than ten copies are asked for. If the group happens to take up an unpublished play, which is often the case, this alone can become a back-breaking problem (Balraj Sahni in SNA, 2007, 307).

As argued in the previous chapter, SNA functions as the parent body promulgating policies and future directions for artistic practice under a national framework facilitating the formulation of “a broad based policy on scientific and systematic lines to institutionalize the growth of art traditions” (SNA 1958, 57). Despite its affiliate bodies and regional akademies in various states, it has not been able to push for the withdrawal of restrictions like the DPA and Entertainment Tax that hinder the growth and survival of performance in India, pointing to scathing gaps between its proclaimed objectives and policy actions. The general consensus on the state support to amateur and professional theatre in the form of cash subsidies or loans, to groups of both travelling and

⁴⁷ The general reaction created by this resolution was that 7 states of Bombay, Madhya Pradesh, Madras, Mysore, Manipur, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh exempted dramatic performances from the state entertainment tax/duty. Other states like Assam, Bihar and Delhi did not amend the existing policy to forego taxing theatre but agreed to consider individual requests for exemption, especially in the case of non-professional drama or where it served a cultural or educational purpose.

non-travelling kinds, finds sanction in the Seminar recommendations. While financial assistance in the form of subsidies and loans to professional groups and commercial theatre companies in the short run is recommended with a view to making them self-supporting in the long run, the way in which this will be achieved does not find any elaboration in the report.

It is not surprising then that in the immediate aftermath of the Seminar, the SNA launched the twin project of promoting Sanskrit theatre productions and folk and traditional forms through instituting national and regional festivals and seminars. The move to set up regional Sangeet Natak akademies was towards duplicating the nation state's efforts of creating a federal structure of centrally controlled and regionally dispersed system of governance. It equally reflected the propagation of a regionalized national theatre movement, the emphasis of which remained the promotion of folk cultures as a route to revive the classical traditions of the *Natyashastra*. In keeping with this underlying policy position, the Government's Song and Drama Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, produced Bhasa's *Svapnavasavadatta* in Hindi, directed by H.V. Gupte in 1956. This was followed by the institution of the Kalidas Festival in Ujjain in 1957 dedicated to showcasing plays of original Sanskrit dramas to consolidate the revival of Sanskrit tradition for modern audiences. As part of the collaboration between central and state academies, SNA nominated Dr. V. Raghavan to serve on the Kalidas Samaroh Samiti set up by the Madhya Pradesh state government and sanctioned an *ad hoc* grant-in-aid of Rs.10,000 towards the Kalidas Samaroh. In the following year, the All-India Kalidas Art exhibition was inaugurated with music and dance performances alongside renderings of Kalidas's *Shakuntala*, *Malavikagnimitram* and *Vikramorvashiyam* in original Sanskrit. Notable among the early efforts to analyse and standardize folk performance practices to ensure their revival and preservation

were the documentation activities of the ‘Filming, Recording and Photographic Unit’ of SNA. Recommendations to ensure the survival of the classical form of *Kuchipudi* against its inglorious extinction are filming of *Kuchipudi*, holding of *Kuchipudi* festivals, and awarding scholarships to young talents enabling them to learn and practice the form. While the provision for financial assistance to traditional artists of *Bhagavatham* and *Bhavai*, the two forms representative of the folk and classical traditions, was made through money earmarked as grants in SNA’s annual budget, no action plan is laid out for documenting the forms. The general recommendations from the Seminar list “preservation, promotion and study of folk drama” as a category that SNA was advised to undertake, which only states “careful and scientific study of folk drama” with no mention of any suggestion towards how to begin to document and historicize these forms (SNA, 2007, 406). Festivals and seminars focused on revitalizing classical theatre and folk drama were organized by the state akademies.

Chapter 5

Consolidating Policy and Discourse of Tradition and Roots: SNA Annual Reports from 1960-1985

This chapter offers a critical examination of the key institutional programmes and initiatives of Sangeet Natak Akademi launched between 1961-1985 and traces their impact on the discourse and practice of theatre. Interventions in the form of seminars and conferences frame SNA's unwritten policy on theatre through a system of patronage, funding theatre productions, workshops, and state-funded theatre festivals—shaping theatre practice in substantive ways. These institutional endeavours and documentation were centred around traditional theatre. Many of them were first prompted in the Five-Year Plan documents and then revised and implemented by the SNA. For some years after Independence, the assumption was that, in the absence of any clearly articulated national cultural policy, the Five-year Plans were to include (as they did) a broad rubric of cultural policy on, for example, small-scale industry, handicrafts, etc. In the planning documents during the decades of 1960s and 70s, culture was considered an educational resource and included within the larger rubric of education. As discussed in the previous chapters, it was located in the Ministry of Education and continued to remain a minuscule part of it. The neoliberal ideology of the state from 1980 onwards saw culture as central to development, clustered together with tradition and livelihood under the single unified head of the newly created Ministry of Human Resource Development. This linking of culture with aspects of national development such as industry and modern science promoted the economic logic of protection, preservation, and promotion of culture. It came to be seen as national heritage and a valuable economic asset that must be marketed well. The trends of curating and disseminating cultural

forms and resources through national and international festivals to project a well integrated and development-oriented image of the nation also gathered momentum in this period. The artisan, as the bearer of culture, whose protection and sustenance had so far been driven by a cultural logic in the context of a welfare state, was no longer a subject of welfare. He was turned into a human resource who constitutes and contributes economically to the growth of the nation.

The chapter is divided in four sections. The first section examines three pivotal ideas that are routinely used in the SNA annual reports, conference/seminar proceedings, schemes, and plan documents. Notions of ‘folk’, ‘tradition’ and ‘popular’ are treated as keywords that provide the framework to understand underlying assumptions that illuminate the institutional and critical discourse and practice of theatre. Following Raymond Williams, I explore them as keywords to unpack how their meanings have evolved contextually overtime and in relation to the uses and purposes to which they have been put in relation to theatre in India. The second section looks at the history and historical antecedents of key ideological and theatrical modalities that influenced the thinking and practice of theatre from the 1960s onwards. The ideological nationalist agendas of what would come to be known as ‘theatre of the roots’ and its decolonising logic can be located in the twentieth century theatre historiographies, aesthetic practices of the IPTA, and institutional initiatives of the SNA. The third section analyses in detail the seminar proceedings of the SNA ‘Roundtable on the Contemporary Relevance of Traditional Theatre’ (1971) and Bharatiya Natya Sangh’s (BNS) ‘Seminar on Contemporary Playwriting and Play Production’ (1961) as two key institutional events that raise complex questions about the significance of tradition in modern theatre and propose significant interventions to integrate the two. In the following section, several schemes and programmes initiated by the SNA between 1960 and 1985 are dis-

cussed for their intention and efficacy and examined against assertions made in/ through theatre practice. While the discussions and debates from these conference proceedings, annual reports, and plan documents stress the agency and sensibility of the individual playwright or director over and above all else, they also evidence that the SNA's position and commitment to engineering a modern theatre was progressively legitimised and strengthened. It is not the intention of this exegesis to argue that all experiments with tradition, either in production or playwriting have been dependent on an institution or committed to its agendas; neither has the discourse of policy in the arena of the arts or culture been limited to the national Akademies⁴⁸. Rather, the focus of the chapter is the concerted and continued discursive, financial, and ideological investments of the SNA in inventing a tradition-centred performance style.

Theatre and Tradition: Political, Social, and Institutional Contexts

The myriad forms of experimentation with the folk repertoire and the discourse of 'tradition' and 'roots' that began in the 1960s resulted from a new political consciousness. It was impelled by both the belief in the Nehruvian idea of defining a national culture through the arts, as with the growing consciousness that the project had somewhat failed. The rising social and economic challenges as well as political dissatisfaction from the independent nation state took the form of people's protest and regional political assertions of sovereignty. In the cultural sphere, the new middle classes that occupied mainstream urban culture defined its own identity as a stakeholder in the creation of an authentically 'Indian' form of cultural modernity. The need to define the nation in terms of a unitary and composite whole was far greater in this period as social, economic, and political realities threatened the utopias of national imagination of the recent-

⁴⁸ Indian Institute of Advanced Study Seminar on Cultural Policy, 1972

ly won political freedom. The tendency to define cultural identity particularly in terms of the past and as a resource for the future continued well into the 1970s and 1980s, and is reflected in state funded programmes focussing on heritage, classical, and traditional forms that would influence trends and practices in Indian theatre in substantive ways.

Theatre continued to be a form through which many ideological and cultural assertions of the times were made; it was also a form that saw concerted attention by the Akademi and attracted continued financial allocation that increasingly encouraged harnessing the nation's folk forms for the urban stage⁴⁹. By the early seventies, playwrights and directors had begun to incorporate folk materials and conventions into their productions. A heightened awareness of rural forms had started to inform the creative process, providing new resources for theatrical expression. By the 1980s, the discourse of an authentic tradition with neat genealogical ties to an antiquarian national past, bypassing all forms of hybridization, difference, and contradiction, had consolidated as an unambiguous representation of 'Indian culture' in theatre. The focus on ritualistic and non-technological aspects of theatre served the 'national' by discrediting the 'modern' (secular, professional, and technologically up to speed) as Western. By the end of the decade, the 'Roots Movement', as it would come to be called, had been formalised, institutionalised, and eventually prescribed by the SNA through its schemes of promotion and financial support. What may have started as attempts to search for a new theatre language for addressing complex questions of the

⁴⁹ The Fourth Five-Year Plan allocation for supporting these activities falls within the sub-category of cultural programmes and amounted to Rs. 12.49 crore, out of which Rs. 7.26 crore was allocated to the centre and Rs. 5.32 crore to states and union territories. This amount constituted 1.5% of the total 'Education and Manpower' outlay, in comparison to the allocation in the Third Five-Year Plan of Rs. 10 crore. The Fifth Plan (1974-79) created a new subcategory of 'Art and Culture' within 'Education' with a proposed outlay of Rs. 37 crores out of the total outlay of Rs 1285 crores for Education. The total outlay for culture was increased to Rs 83.90 crores in the Sixth Plan. Despite the dire socio-economic conditions of the last fifteen years, the annual allocation to SNA increased from Rs. 10,00,000 in 1961 to Rs. 20,26, 000 in 1980, a total of 102.6% increase over a period of twenty years.

present had been turned into a national form, a style, or a formula with definite and identifiable elements, which would ensure the recognition and inclusion by the Akademi into its institutional frames of national culture. State cultural institutions, primarily the SNA, were at the forefront of these attempts that privileged the form over the traditional performer, leaving no space for the latter.

Unpacking the Terms of Discourse: Tradition, Folk and Popular

Instead of defining ‘roots’ in a pan-Indian context, it is more productive to map out the concept, not as a neutral undertaking but rather in all its complexity through its application. The terms that are routinely used as conceptual descriptors of theatre in India, such as ‘traditional’, ‘folk’, and ‘popular’ become complex, inter-connected and multilayered when examined as "keywords" or operative concepts. For Raymond Williams, these are words “the problem of... [whose] meanings... [is] inextricably bound up with the problems it was being used to discuss" (1985, 15). Rather than simply reflecting the processes of society and history, they signal “important social and historical processes [that] occur *within* language...indicating] how integral the problems of meanings and of relationships really are” (ibid, 22). In this section, I shall attempt to unpack some of the conceptual and contextual commingling of these terms and situate them within their multiple uses in Indian theatre.

Within the post-independence discourse of theatre, many genres got lumped together under the coinage of the term ‘folk’ which originated and operates in contradistinction to the term ‘classical’. While the latter refers to those performance genres that use Sanskrit texts and owe allegiance to the dramaturgical structure and practices prescribed in *Natyashastra*, the former

covers everything else⁵⁰. By the 1930s, the process of classification and codification of classical dances was already underway, producing classical forms of dance and theatre, a category against which folk forms could be readily contrasted. It also created clear lines of distinction, neat genealogies, and hierarchy between the folk and the classical. Vasudha Dalmia argues that the two, “classicising of tradition and the turn toward the common ‘folk’ were in a sense interdependent processes” (2006, 158). She also suggests that this early work on and attention towards folk forms was a precursor to the political activism of the 1940s that used local popular culture and traditional folk forms to communicate and connect with the masses and garner their participation towards explicitly anti-fascist and anti-imperialist struggle. Rustom Bharucha notes that while it is not certain when the term folk entered the vocabulary of Indian theatre, its popularity can be traced back at least to the IPTA movement that propelled the urban artists to trace their roots in rural culture (1989, 1909). It was in the work of IPTA that folk forms were, for the very first time, publicly proclaimed and used to engage with the people to whom they belonged. The repertoire of folk, in the official cultural discourse since independence, has continued to remain loose and ever expanding, defying any neat definitions, with more and more ‘regional’ and ‘rural’ performance forms being ‘discovered’ and added to it.

While the term ‘popular’ (origins from the Latin *popularis*) shares with ‘folk’ the connotation of belonging to the people, its fifteenth and sixteenth century roots refer to a legal and political system. The more commonly understood sense of its usage as ‘low’ or ‘base’ has continued since then. In its modern meaning of being ‘widely-favoured’ or ‘well-liked’, it signals actions

⁵⁰ Ranging from the environmental ritual community performance of *Ramlila*; to the largely improvised dance-drama interpretations of mythological stories through mudras and narration of Kathakali; to *Nautanki*, a popular secular entertainment form incorporating song and dance; including mass entertainment of Bollywood for both rural and urban audiences.

that are not always undertaken in genuine or deserving ways but by gaining favour and calculation. This derogatory use of the term may not be altogether disconnected from a reference to actions, behaviours, and (mal)practices of people of the lower strata of society, such as the definition by Collier in 1697 as “a courting the favour of the people by undue practices” (qtd. in Williams, 1985, 111). It is only later, perhaps in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, that it came to be associated with people and that which is widely liked rather than with unfair use of power by them. It has since continued to be identified with both overlapping senses of the term, i.e., work that is lowly or inferior and practices belonging to the lower classes. It is important to point out that in the performance sphere, there are no distinct demarcations between the lively popular performance modes of respective regions and the umbrella of ‘folk’ theatre that often flattens linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity.

The wide ranging use of the notion of ‘tradition’ gained currency in the cultural discourse of independent India. Originating from the Latin word *tradere* which means to ‘hand over’ or ‘deliver’, its use connotes doctrines and knowledge systems that have been ‘handed down’ or ‘passed on’ over generations. In its wider mobilisation within the sphere of the symbolic, it is also used interchangeably with the concept of ‘heritage’. While Raymond Williams (1958) theorises traditions as essentially selective, Hobsbawm and Ranger propose that traditions have been increasingly subject to invention in the present (1983, 2-5). The underlying implication common to both these impulses is how tradition and heritage both “represent a means for those in the present to [re]organise the (historical) past – sometimes for overtly ideological ends, sometimes not” (Lowenthal quoted in Bennett, Grossberg & Morris, 2005, 153). Within the Indian cultural context, tradition has referred to those practices that ensue from the *Natyashastra* and are there-

fore deemed ‘classical’, as well as those that are to be located amidst the people in different regions and languages, categorised as ‘folk’. In postcolonial India, tradition and modernity have been imagined as temporally interdependent and defining complements of each other in a way that tradition is linked to the past and modernity to the future. It has served as a discursive terrain on which the recovery of the past through tradition, assertions of indigeneity and the elaboration of modernity is staged. The search for authentic cultural forms is tied to unearthing unquestionable origins, and as Anuradha Kapur reminds us, equally assumes that “there is something essentially antagonistic to the true ‘Tradition’” (1988, 5).

Eric Hobsbawm understands acts of ‘cultural preservation’ or ‘subversion’ as an invention of tradition’, a process whereby the newly invented tradition is placed within the mainstream of tradition itself (1983, 2-6). Rustom Bharucha, developing this thesis for the Indian context argues that the most conspicuous of modern national ‘inventions’ are ‘fabrications’ such as the Republic Day parade where the diverse cultures of India are ‘unified’ through a carefully choreographed spectacle⁵¹. Bharucha examines the category of “folk” and the SNA sponsored “theatre of roots”, as “inventions of the urban intelligentsia” (1989, 1907). He sees the central institutional space, the SNA located in New Delhi, as “the centre where tradition is “invented”, “manufactured”, and “exported” with an increasingly efficient and “centralised system” (1909). Another cultural extravaganzas that has followed the parade are the series of ‘Festivals of India’ abroad and the ‘Apna Utsav’ events of New Delhi from the 1980s that serve as sites where “the Indian

⁵¹ The Ministry of Culture, Government of India, in association with seven Zonal Cultural Centres of SNA, organized ‘Lok Tarang - National Folk Dance Festival’ every year as part of the Republic Day parade from the 1950s onwards. Folk dances from various parts of the country were performed in Delhi and a running ‘Best Folk Dance’ trophy was awarded to the most colourful, vibrant, and authentic folk dance every year.

tradition' was affirmed, not necessarily as people in India would understand it, but as our government would like to represent it to the world" (ibid., 1907).

While there may be many elements in common between popular forms and what came to be categorised as 'folk', by the late twentieth century the latter had transformed into a stable repository of tradition, valued for its inheritance of and derivation from the all-encompassing Sanskrit theatre tradition. The interventions of SNA towards their research and conservation had been geared towards integrating these artistic forms of the people into the mainstream national culture thereby reviving the classical Sanskrit past. The 'popular', rural and urban, on the other hand, had been disapproved as low, unsophisticated, and vulgar, marginalised from the echelons of cultural discourse as well as from state patronage. Interestingly, several forms that were considered as 'popular' and therefore worth transcending in the present were eventually subsumed within the folk through a careful rearrangement of its materials to make them palatable to the urban middle classes. The antiquity and purity of the many folk forms as compared to the popular is questionable since several took shape only in the eighteenth- nineteenth century. Neither can it be assumed that it is the folk that influences the popular due to its direct and uninterrupted connection with the people over a long period of time; rather, many popular forms of performance and entertainment have influenced the folk traditions. It is important to remember that the popular and the folk overlapped in myriad ways, as several popular forms were modified and rechristened as folk before being accommodated within the nationalist imagination. Within the institutional discourse of theatre, dominated by the urban middle class artists and cultural bureaucrats, these additions and interpolations have of course been seen only as commercial perversions and moral corruptions of the authentic folk forms that must be undone. This tension between the folk

and the popular and the denigration of the popular does not begin with the state interventions through institutions like the SNA in the post-independence period. It dates back to the mid nineteenth century when a new culture was being devised by the emerging middle class to address its rising social and cultural aspirations in colonial centres like Calcutta. Sumanta Banerjee argues that the bourgeois hegemony over the plebeian/ popular culture aided the upward movement of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois classes to the status of the elite (1989, 13-15). As the new middle class, distinguished clearly from the lower orders, established itself in the city as the Western inspired and colonially educated *bhadralok*, with adjusted cultural preferences, mannerism, and tastes, the marginalisation and eventual eradication of the popular cultural expressions from the city was complete. The heterogeneous migrant population, the first labouring class to settle in the city, and their artistic forms and cultural expressions had been successfully displaced or at best relegated to the margins of the metropolis by an ever homogenising elite group.

In the preceding discussion, I demonstrate that the categories of the folk, popular, and classical traditions are not self-contained, fixed, and discrete. Neither can a simplistic one way relationship of descent and influence be established between them. The view that folk forms are the unsophisticated remnants of the primal and all-encompassing classical tradition and popular forms are the moral and commercial perversions made to the folk, is not only historically untenable but also culturally misleading. It creates false gaps and hierarchies between forms that have evolved through complex processes deriving from the colonial encounter and ensuing developments of nineteenth century urbanisation. Notions of hybridity, tactics of mimicry, moral and political charge of nationalism, and the enduring stages of decolonisation have meant that cultural forms have undergone significant transformations of style, format, and aesthetic outcomes to re-

main relevant and commercially viable. These multiple forces engendered what Geeta Kapur calls “the modernising logic” in cultural production (1991). The possibility of tradition existing in any untouched, recoverable, or pure form is only a myth and at best, a postcolonial utopia; they exist only as mediations. The selection of forms and their distinct aspects that are then sought to be revived and appropriated for the postcolonial present is built upon the notion of an authentic identity, making indigeneity and authenticity a matter of form. Moreover, any attempt to recreate a vanished way of life in a continuously changing social context inevitably slips into revivalism and must itself die a natural death. Given this historical context, it is worth questioning the rationale and extent of post-independence experiments in folk and traditional theatre and its institutional claims of restoring an authentic pre-colonial form and aesthetic to create a contemporary theatre practice.

Historical Antecedents of the Turn Towards Folk: Historiographical Assertions, IPTA and *Thanathunatavedi*

As argued in Chapter 4, state policy on theatre in postcolonial India was based on a tradition oriented approach that viewed ‘folk’ performances as the later and less polished regional variants of a glorious Sanskritic tradition that flowed out seamlessly from the *Natyashastra*. The need to synthesize modern European theatre and traditional Indian performance, imagined to have emanated and evolved in distinct and mutually discreet ways, was dominant in the discourse of theatre in the early independence years. But the ideological erasure of modernity and its cultural forms that this brought about is to be located back to nineteenth century Orientalist commentaries on theatre and nationalist historiographies by Indian theatre historians in the twentieth century. As argued in Chapter 1, the writing of national theatre histories was central to con-

structing a progressive nation state and impacted the world of theatre companies and the lives of its artists in a real sense. The postcolonial nation's assertiveness towards indigenous tradition was mirrored in the theatre histories of the late twentieth century. Studies by Kapila Vatsyayan (1980), H.N. Dasgupta (2002), Adya Rangacharya (1971), and Nemichandra Jain (1995) articulate a version of theatre history commensurate with the cultural dichotomy between the urban and rural, folk and modern theatre, arguably created under conditions of colonialism.

The desire to 'decolonise' the stage through the use of its indigenous 'roots' and the evolution of 'Theatre of Roots' into a movement was, therefore, legitimised as much by history writing as by institutional efforts. It was based on the assumption that the formal, aesthetic, and representational aspects of pre-colonial folk traditions were an authentic alternative to Western modernity and could be recovered from recuperating a usable past engineered by the Akademi's initiatives. The nature and value of art and its pursuit shifted from being the creative questioning of those in doubt and turmoil to the creative works of those who pursued their craft employing sophisticated techniques and devices borrowed from the regional performative traditions on the lines of the official policy of the state. The assertion of our 'own' theatre, rooted in and emerging from the encounter with Western modernity, was fast usurped into an institutional agenda that directed Indian theatre, formally, aesthetically, and ideologically, towards folk and indigenous traditions and away from its colonial markers. The cultural nationalist critique of theatrical modernity and the inadequacy of its (Western) aesthetics to communicate the complexities of contemporary India are well articulated in 1956 Drama Seminar proceedings (Chapter 3). These discussions provided the basis on which the state would model its interventions with the primary objective of providing patronage and conserving tradition.

And yet, the preference for and return to roots in the preceding discourse and trends in practice were not always aligned with the dominant nationalist frameworks of traditionalism and revival insisted upon by the Akademi. The approaches to tradition, dramaturgical structure, and performance language also differed in culture and linguistic terms. Many theatre directors and playwrights drew their approach to tradition from the pre-independence political theatre model of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). As a cultural movement that grew from the progressive anti-fascist and anti-imperialist thinking of the 1940s internationally, IPTA's agenda of an 'Indian' cultural practice evoked tradition that would be used to reach out to the masses in forms that were familiar to them and rooted in their own social and cultural contexts. In that, their commitment to the traditional and folk arose out of an artistic and social need for communicating with the rural masses rather than as an outcome of any anxiety over forms or their revival and conservation, which was only a secondary agenda at best, and a somewhat lesser successful one too. Communication and connection became catalysts for experimentation with folk theatre forms that many IPTA members and regional units undertook⁵². The IPTA treatment of and approach to folk forms was principally different from the concerns that drove the roots theatre. Its rejection of proscenium, the realist/ naturalist form, and modern stage techniques was not to claim an authentic Indian tradition in contradistinction to Western theatre but an assertion of a theatricality that could make the folk material work for the 'folk'. In doing so, traditional forms were harnessed, sometimes selectively, evaluated for their efficacy and appropriateness and channelled towards a theatre of change, creating a somewhat modern, yet playful relationship with tradition. IPTA adopted an approach to tradition rooted in contemporary consciousness fu-

⁵² Dina Gandhi's work with the folk form of Gujarat, *Bhavai* discussed at length in her presentation at the 1956 Drama Seminar, is a case in point.

elled by curiosity about the past and the future, grounded in the realities of the present. Those associated with or influenced by the IPTA continued to engage with folk and traditional forms well after IPTA's organisational dismemberment in 1948. Despite SNA's appropriation of their theatre work as traditional theatre or representative of the roots approach, playwrights and directors like Habib Tanvir, Badal Sircar, Girish Karnad, and Vijay Tendulkar employed a critical and unsentimental awareness of traditional forms and their changing contexts and remained critical of the Akademi's perspectives. They questioned and negotiated with tradition as a changing and potentially change-oriented set of practices. Any and all essentialization, loyalty, and conformism were rejected in favour of a historically embedded scepticism and irreverence towards dominant interpretations.

For many post-independence theatre makers, the search was not so much for a form, but rather, for a toolkit to enable vital acts of experiential, aesthetic, cultural, and social transformation through theatre drawing upon local traditional practice. The first theoretical articulation towards a non-Western, (an indigenous) theatre was initiated as a discussion in Kerala by the Malayalam theatre scholar and playwright G. Shankara Pillai along with literary activists C.N.Sreekanth Nair, K Ayyappa Panikkar, M. Govindan, and others during the first Natakakkalari held at Sasthamcotta in 1967. Following it in the next Natakakkalari held at Koothattukulam, the playwright C. N. Sreekanth Nair presented the paper titled 'Thanathunatakavedi' (1968) meaning 'one's own theatre'. This idea advocated using the performing arts of Kerala, previously ignored under the influence of colonial performance aesthetics, as the basis for a new modern theatre language and performance culture.

Discursive Grounds for 'Theatre of Roots': Conferences and Seminars of 1961 and 1971

Sangeet Natak Akademi's 'Roundtable on the Contemporary Relevance of Traditional Theatre' (1971) was the first institutionally organised conference dedicated explicitly to the quest for an 'indigenous' identity of contemporary theatre through a recourse to folk forms. It was organised under the secretaryship of Suresh Awasthi (1965-75), whose support and leadership over the next decade or so would become central to what would emerge as the Roots Movement. In his introduction at the outset of the roundtable, Suresh Awasthi makes the observations:

When I talk of the tradition in the context of creative activity I talk only as it concerns a creative artist. In my view no creative artiste really can afford to ignore the situation that we have a vast, rich, continuous tradition in all these fields of performing arts. It seems to me that even for rejecting the tradition, for discarding it, for destroying it, we have to build up some kind of creative link and relationship with it. It is compelling; it is inevitable. We just cannot escape it. Cannot become indifferent to it. (SNA Proceeding, 1971, 5-6)

The moral highhandedness of Awasthi's remarks ameliorates his claim made with regard to tradition at the 1961 seminar on 'Contemporary Playwriting and Play Production', organised by the Bhartiya Natya Sangh, Delhi. The ground for the 1971 discourse on tradition was laid out in clear terms in the 1961 seminar by Awasthi, who was then the general secretary of BNS. The 1961 seminar of the BNS marks continuity of format and purpose with the Drama Seminar, while also departing from its established edifices. Recalling the assertions of the 1961 seminar in 1971, Awasthi remarked that it was then said that,

We had no past in the theatre. Whereas we have a past of more than two thousand years.

It was also said that whatever past we had, is irrelevant for us today for our contemporary theatre work (ibid, 6).

For Awasthi, it was through dabbling into ‘tradition’ and inventing an indigenous theatrical idiom that the nation’s cultural past could be revived and a link between the past and the present forged. Recounting the relevance of articulating the idea of tradition since the 1960s, Awasthi notes that, “The idea was then ridiculed, and I was dubbed a revivalist and reactionary by practitioners of the colonial theatre and reporters of theatre events...They also spoke as prophets of the doom of traditional theatre” (SNA Report, 1985, 85-99). The focus was on designing the contemporary more specifically in terms of its stylistic modalities. Suresh Awasthi’s presentation at the 1961 seminar details the forms of stage used in folk theatre, styles of production in terms of informal performance space, settings, music, dance, narration, and dialogue used, theatrical conventions such as the use of chorus, the *Sutradhaar*, stylised devices such as masks and headgears, and multiplicity and simultaneity of scene organisation. The intention was to integrate these folk elements with modern practices as the latter was recognisably neither ‘traditional’ nor ‘Indian’. As the previous chapters argue, the process of constructing an unbroken lineage of ‘Indian’ theatre practice had been underway since the early years of independence. Equally, the usefulness of folk and Sanskrit traditions for the theatre of the future had already been well established by the SNA and cemented in the discourse of its 1956 Drama Seminar. The 1960s offered a shift in the way they were to be viewed.

The explicit purpose of the 1961 seminar was to discuss the “various artistic and organisational problems relating to the twin problems of playwriting and production with particular reference to conditions in the theatre in the various language areas of India” (Proceedings, BNS

Seminar on ‘Contemporary Playwriting and Play Production’, 1961, 2). The urgent problem of the relationship between the playwright and the producer was then articulated by many as a specifically modern issue, with folk and classical traditions offering models of close association and collaboration between the two. The conference proceedings and discussions actively established that the colonial experience and its practices modelled on Western theatre like the popular Parsi theatre, had severed the past tradition of *Natyashastra* and its descendant traditional drama; the return to tradition in the present was meant to “reverse the colonial course of contemporary theatre” (Awasthi, 1989, 48). So, while passing references were made to the working relationship between the playwright and the producer in the commercial practices of the Parsi theatre and other ‘advanced’ regional theatres of Bengal and Maharashtra, no detailed discussion or historical analysis is made of the structure of the popular tradition from where these roles had evolved into their present forms. The popular and hybrid were effectively expunged from the framework of the traditional which was turned into a question of form for modern theatre. While the cultural authenticity and historical legitimacy of tradition is drawn from its unhindered connection to the past, it does not qualify as modern, the reference for which remains western theatre. The focus was on creating a text-based and a playwright-centred ‘national style’ that uses music and dance in drama (*thouryathrika*). While written dramatic texts and the contribution to the literary form may be the basis of distinction between ‘folk’ and the modern urban drama for Awasthi, the evaluation and intended revival of the former must be based on its literary merits examined in the same way as written texts are. The lack of good plays, regular performances and the ‘alienation of the playwright’ from the theatre-making process is sought to be addressed by training in the craft of modern playwriting and production, the inclusion of playwrights in amateur and professional

theatre groups and creating a central repository of information on plays, playwrights, translations, and other production details (BNS Proceedings, 1961, 116-18). The recommendations made after the seminar also include legal protections for the author in the form of copyright, fees, and royalties. It is interesting to notice how BNS, a private cultural organisation headed by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and managed by theatre persons like Suresh Awasthi who would soon go onto become important cultural administrators in charge of SNA, comes to exert influence on the nation's cultural policy. In its organisational structure as a national institution located in the centre with regional centres in all language areas and the capacity of bringing together over three hundred theatre groups from all over the country, BNS mirrors state interventions, assuming the status of a quasi-state institution for itself.

If the aim of the 1961 seminar was to evaluate the dramatic heritage and relate it to the contemporary through discussion on “productions of Sanskrit plays and their value for modern times as well as the forms and techniques of folk drama and their possible use in the urban theatre”, by 1971, SNA's recourse to folk forms had institutionalised ‘tradition’ as an inevitable element of modern theatre practice (BNS Proceeding, 1961, 2). It was also within this span of 10 years that “the gulf between the traditional and modern heritage” had been bridged (SNA, 1971 proceedings, 6). The question had shifted from being whether traditional forms were relevant to contemporary theatre in 1961 to how to use these genres to convey a modern sensibility for an urban audience. Associated to this were the questions of form and its purity, the responsibility of the urban theatre maker in using traditional material, and a discussion of successful examples of this new hybrid theatre. In that, it had followed up on the agenda set forth in the 1956 seminar of integrating artistic forms of the ‘people’ into mainstream national culture. And once it had been

established that “in our case where tradition is a continuous living vital force”, it was the “creative artist”, repeatedly referred to in the 1971 proceedings, who was central to the process of “confronting” the traditional and integrating it with the urban. (Awasthi, 1971, 7). With regard to the relationship of the urban practitioner to tradition, he asks,

...what should be our attitude; how can we assimilate, how can it become an integral part of our contemporary activity; is it going to survive only as a museum piece? How can it be adopted most suitably for urban audiences? Also, how can it be supported in its own milieu?’ (SNA Proceedings, 1971: Sangeet Natak, 7).

In his introductory paper on the importance of the roundtable, Awasthi prescribes ‘exploration and creative utilization of tradition’, setting forth the SNA’s agenda for the next two decades that created a new ethnic urban theatre using the formalistic elements of folk and traditional performance (SNA, 1971 proceedings, 6). Uncritical questions about authenticity, Indian-ness, and novelty arose in the discussions that subordinated more interesting differences between the modern and traditional theatre viz.aesthetics, structure, staging conventions, training methods, design, spectatorship and interaction, political and creative agendas. What the conference also achieved was the legitimization of the unequal relationship between modern theatre practitioners and their traditional counterparts. Folk and traditional forms could be, uncritically and unapologetically, used to create a modern Indian theatrical canon for an urban audience, in the spirit of modernist experimentation and encounter with tradition. The 1971 roundtable marks a crucial arrival of the urban artist as an active agent in the discourse of tradition, without forging a creative link and relationship with which, the task of defining a contemporary theatre and the nation itself, would remain incomplete.

The three day long roundtable held from February 19 to 21 in New Delhi was structured in the form of short presentations that centred on challenges of modernity on traditional and folk forms, emphasising the contemporary relevance of tradition and its creative utilisation for modern urban theatre. Pre-conference performances of *Bhavai* and *Nacha* were organised for all delegates that remained largely disconnected from the main conference proceedings with no representation of the performers of these forms in the discussions that followed. In addition to the performance demonstrations, a photographic exhibition of over one hundred photographs covering twenty-five major forms of traditional theatre prevailing throughout India was displayed. Accompanied by background music, the exhibition illustrated various aspects of traditional theatre⁵³. Together, the curation of the exhibition, performances and the conference papers fulfilled two purposes: firstly, to invent the narrative of a continuing theatrical tradition that emanates from its Sanskritic progenitor, successfully forging “links of the traditional theatre with the classical forms”; and secondly, to offer a shared template of conventions and practices for a wide range of folk forms on the basis of “similarities in their structural design and technique and conventions of presentation”(1988, 61-62). In the process, a credible typology of folk and classical traditions was constructed and forms varying in their social contexts, historicity, and content were bracketed together as ‘folk’. This practice of exhibiting de-contextualised performances in

⁵³ An article in the Akademi’s journal *Sangeet Natak*, titled ‘Exhibition on Traditional Theatre’ published details of the exhibition that included traditional theatre artefacts such as masks and puppets, and photos illustrating make-up, costumes, preliminaries, rituals and ceremonies, conventions, dramatic scenes etc. of the traditional repertoire (1988, 61-2). The exhibition was conceived in five sections—the first demonstrating classical forms such as *Koodiyattam*, *Kathakali* and *Krishnattam*; the second section was devoted to images of processional and pageantry forms such as *Ramleela* of Ramnagar and *Rasleela*, *Ankia Nat* and *Yakshagana*; the third section was on ritualistic dance theatre like the *Lama* dance and the *Chhau*; the fourth represented operatic secular theatre of different regions including *Jatra* of Bengal, *Nautanki* of Uttar Pradesh, *Swang* of Haryana and Punjab, *Khyal* of Rajasthan, *Maach* of Madhya Pradesh, *Bhavai* of Gujarat, *Tamasha* of Maharashtra, *Veedinatakam* of Andhra Pradesh and *Terukoothu* of Tamil Nadu; the final section of the exhibition was on various forms and styles of puppet theatre from different regions including hand and leather puppets (61-62)

exotic ornamental costume song-dance parade framework had already been established by the SNA through its curation of the National Folk Dance Festival as part of Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi from 1954 onwards (2008, 192). The decision to exhibit traditional performance photos on the Akademi walls in Delhi further fostered the notion of folk theatre as being merely instrumental. The politics of theatre, Vasudha Dalmia notes, would make a departure from hereon, becoming more “decorative and conformist” (2012, 222). Of the sixty playwrights, directors, and theatre critics who attended the conference⁵⁴, with the exception of Habib Tanvir, were mostly those working in urban environments and

many of the discussions reflected the experiments, questions and anxieties of their practice. As Vasudha Dalmia puts it, they were already a part of a process which was reconfiguring playwriting and many of them would go on to become key figures in the national theatre scene (2012, 217).

Erin B. Mee writes about the importance of Awasthi’s 1961 initiative and his ensuing efforts later as SNA secretary (1965-75) towards inventing ‘theatre of the roots’ movement that, “the 1961 seminar marks the beginning of Awasthi’s leadership in the movement, and it is important for tracking the developing theoretical frameworks and conceptual problems of the movement” (2008, 187). Awasthi himself views the 1961 and 1971 events with some historical importance, as “points of reference for students and historians of contemporary Indian theatre” (297). They were as crucial as SNA’s organising efforts towards tradition-inspired theatre within the discourse of Indian theatre. Rustom Bharucha further points to the parallel trajectory of the

⁵⁴ Some of the prominent theatre makers and thinkers present at the seminar from across linguistic regions and political orientations included Utpal Dutt, G. Shankar Pillai, Shanta Gandhi, Satyadev Dubey, E. Alkazi, Girish Karnad, Kapila Vatsyayan, N.C. Jain, J.C. Mathur etc.

movement with the “rise and fall of Awasthi as an important cultural official in New Delhi” (1993, 206). Charting his own role in the development of this theatre in ‘Defence of the Theatre of Roots’, published in a special issue of *Sangeet Natak* (1985), Awasthi refers to the “return to and discovery of tradition as inspired by a search for roots and a quest for identity” (1985, 85-86). It is interesting to note the shift in Awasthi’s tone in the 1971 seminar from his presentation in the 1956 Drama Seminar⁵⁵. Two changes emerge from the presentations made on these two occasions, held fifteen years apart from one another. Firstly, as opposed to a more open and less patronising tone in 1956, that proposed to acknowledge the drama of the non-literate as a definite art form with its own laws and conventions’ and suggests reviving folk forms in their own context, his 1971 presentation centres the ‘traditional’ in creating a national form. His intervention acquired a clear position of “making a deliberate effort (as creative artists) of exploring the tradition”, and the rationale that, “it is only in this process that we can assimilate, recreate and destroy the tradition” ((SNA Proceedings, 1971, 6). The institutional plans that follow emphasise the exploration and utilisation of folk forms in contemporary theatre practice as the only means of reviving them. In his presentation at the 1956 seminar, Awasthi had already

⁵⁵ Earlier in his presentation at the 1956 Drama Seminar titled ‘Hindi folk drama’, Awasthi evaluated the stage conventions of folk drama as distinct from the modern formal closed theatres (SNA, 2007, 136-46). He placed the folk in continuation with the medieval ‘variety’ theatre, which in-turn inherited from the classical, proclaiming that the folk also had “several codified conventions” that are only different from those of the drama of the literate people (read urban audiences and practitioners) (145). In discussing the present situation of decay and extinction, Awasthi forwarded solutions for ‘rehabilitation and reorganization’ of folk drama that suggested infrastructural development in the theatre for improving circumstances of play presentation. The recommendations included building theatres, making changes to the pattern of the form of the folk, introducing new content into these plays, and introducing a planned programme of ‘research and survey’ of forms. While Awasthi mentions the grim reality of the rural folk performer’s lives, the immediate solutions he forwards in the ‘reorganizational schemes’ are to appropriate the form as ‘data’ that needs to be collected and ‘used’. He recommends—“Collection of all existing data is of paramount importance today, when we envisage a plan for a theatre movement in the country. It will help us to venture into new stage experiments and vitally contribute to the literary drama” (ibid) The act of collecting this data must be aided by scientific equipment and modern investigational techniques (taken) to the villages and collect the material from first-hand sources. It is also essential that for the evaluation and analysis of this material, we follow the same course and principles as in the case of literary drama” (ibid).

argued for further exploring “avenues of mutual exchange between the drama of the urban and folk traditions” through recounting recent stage experiments that effectively employ conventions of folk drama (144). But rather than seeing this process continue and unfold organically, he suggests that “the speed of exchange is to be accelerated and the area of contact and cooperation widened for their mutual benefit” (ibid). It is, therefore, the repeated exercise of engineering a national prototype by mixing forms and histories that a crucial mode of state intervention in theatre was designed. Commenting on SNA’s policies, Vasudha Dalmia argues that the Indian Emergency had a huge effect on cultural production, resulting in folk theatre becoming decorative and conformist, losing all the political sting of the IPTA consciousness (2006, 198). The discussions on how to use traditional performance excluded any mention of the experiments done by IPTA in the 1940s and the avenues it opened for mobilizing a mass movement through culture. This included purposeful restructuring of traditional and folk forms, introducing new content, and creating a vast audience base in rural and urban areas. The systematic erasure of the history of IPTA, its political agenda and contribution to innovating folk culture that began with the Drama Seminar, was complete with the 1971 roundtable.

A slew of recommendations were made to provide patronage and infrastructural support to traditional theatre to aid its sustenance within its local or regional contexts. Many of these suggestions either reiterated or built upon those made in the 1956 seminar⁵⁶. But the main thrust of the recommendations was on exposing the traditional theatrical forms to modern drama and building a ‘rapport’ between the traditional and modern artists. In the 1971 roundtable, Awasthi

⁵⁶ The recommendations included introduction of traditional forms as a compulsory component of school education; supporting the quality of production through training; skill development for modern context; making fully-equipped self-contained vans available for hire; strengthening the system of grants and awards through regional and local festivals; and financial assistance by the Ministry of Tourism.

puts forth the deployment and utility of folk forms for urban audiences, completely eliminating the use of urban forms for rural audiences. Rural folk forms as “continuous living vital force of ‘pure tradition’” are placed right at the centre and made the sine qua non of the nationalist process of “decolonization of our lifestyle, values, social institutions, creative forms and cultural modes” (Awasthi, 1985, 295). The gulf between the traditional and modern was, in fact, concretised by the recommendations that contrived to ‘foster’ and ‘promote’ exposure, understanding and use of traditional performance by agents outside the regional context of the traditional, primarily by and for the use of modern playwrights and performers.

Shaping the Modern Through Traditional and Folk Practices: Institutional Programmes and Policies from 1960-1985

In November 1963, the Akademi formed a sub-committee to ‘liberalise’ rules and re-formulate the process of recognition of institutions. The purpose was to ‘weed out’ institutions on the basis of the new significance of ‘recognition’ (SNA, Annual Report 1963-64, 9). The revised list of recognised institutions included those whose status had been updated from ‘beneficiaries’ to a distinctively ‘coveted privilege’, treated at par with the Akademi fellows (SNA, Annual Report 1964-65, Appendix III, 28). This revision made all state Akademies, regional training and research institutions, and professional companies of music, dance and drama eligible for financial assistance from the central SNA⁵⁷. At the same time, it excluded from the system of support and patronage those institutions that were involved in ‘elementary’ training as well as amateur organisations like music circles and dramatic clubs. Even while ‘Affiliation and Recognition’ was

⁵⁷ The process of review and selection of cultural institutions to this ‘coveted list’ as well as implementation of the rules framed for recognition was carried out by academic boards constituted separately for music, dance, and drama. In the case of drama the board comprised eminent theatre critics, directors, and playwrights—B.V. (Mama) Warerkar, Shombhu Mitra, Balwant Gargi, Sahasranamam, E. Alkazi and Mohan Khokar.

intended to confer the status of excellence and offer financial support and access to resources of the central academy, the revised system made the selection procedure more centralised, with greater monitoring and control of the SNA over its state units asserting the earlier 'subordination of the regional under the national' perspective⁵⁸. While the Aademi explicitly ruled out any distinction between amateur and professional institutions in awarding them 'recognition', the determining criteria of 'regularity of performance' and 'excellence of standards' made the case of amateur groups and local performance institutions very difficult. Lack of resources, training, and cultural capital is precisely what distinguishes the quality and regularity of amateur performance from the professional. SNA's revised framework of 'performing institutions' distinguished clearly from those performing on an ad hoc basis underlines its preference for supporting professional theatre companies and weeds out those groups that strive to exist despite unfavourable conditions. This policy of recognition and affiliation privileged the institutional process of canon formation in the arts by creating financial provisions for eminent producers/directors.

The framework of "revival and development' of India's cultural past through preservation, circulation through publishing, and re-interpretation of its language, literature, fine arts, dance, drama, and music was already laid out in the Third Five-Year Plan (1961-66). Culture, including performing arts, continued to remain a minuscule part of education and manpower

⁵⁸ The reports reveal that matters of framing curricula and syllabi of studies and programmes of research in regional educational institutions, the qualifications of teaching staff, and the standards of teaching in regional institutions needed prior approval of the central SNA which also reserved the right to disaffiliate a recognized institution at any time if in its opinion the institution fell below its original standard.

right through the Fourth and Fifth Five-Year plans that cover the period between 1969-79⁵⁹. These planning documents offer a heritage perspective that backdates culture and manifests in the focus on museums, archeological objects, and the disciplines of anthropology and ethnography. This kind of a focus serves not as an “inquiry into the past, but a celebration of it ... a profession of faith in a past tailored to present-day purposes’ (Lowenthal, 1997, x). It is not concerned with the pursuit of history but re-packaging of the past for purposes in the present, often nationalistic ones. A preoccupation with the question of a ‘national identity’ defined by tradition lay behind these schemes of revival. Documentation and training carried out in the late 1960s till 1985 eventually paved the way for the state-sponsored and tradition-inspired ‘theatre of the roots’. Here, ‘roots’ were located not only in the past, or any past, but in the relics of a rich and ancient ‘Hindu’ past that could now be recuperated only through the culture of the folk. And yet, there was an acute sense of obsolescence associated with rural, folk, and tribal forms of performance that could only be preserved and sustained through scientific and anthropologically oriented documentation. The (im)possibility of capturing the form in its integrity and purity through objective modes of recording became a prime concern of the Akademi, overlooking experiments in theatre practice that moved beyond the discourse of authenticity. From 1970-71, the Akademi initiated the “survey and documentation of folk and traditional music, dance and drama” as part

⁵⁹ The Fourth and Fifth Plan periods, 1969-74 and 1974-79 respectively, were peculiar from the point of view of the planning exercise. Due to the failure of the Third Five-year Plan, the Government of India did not implement the Fourth Five-year Plan. This period (April 1, 1966 to March 31, 1969) is known as a ‘plan holiday’ in Indian planning period. Culture continued to be managed by the three Akademies, the Archaeological Survey of India and the National and other museums. The Fifth Plan (1974-79) was terminated in 1978 before its completion due to global inflation, acute food shortages, economic instability, and a submission of a new plan for 1978-80. This was again rejected and rolling plans were created annually. The revised Fifth Plan also provisioned for “further development of the three national academies of Sahitya, Sangeet Natak and Lalit Kala, propagation of culture among college and school students, revision of district gazetteers and development of various activities of the Archaeological Survey of India” (Plan outlays and Programmes of Development, 5th five-year plan, <https://niti.gov.in/planningcommission.-gov.in/docs/plans/planrel/fiveyr/index5.html>, accessed online July 3, 2021)

of its four-part programme⁶⁰ (SNA, Annual Report 1971-72, 20-21). The scheme included selecting and commissioning performances of folk and traditional theatre forms and offering fellowships for students to train in these forms under gurus and expert groups of artists to revive and popularise them (ibid, 24). The question of the traditional performer and the fast changing contexts of rural India were largely precluded from this understanding of ‘revival and development’ or action plans of documentation. These policy actions coincided with promotion of practical training in traditional forms offered by visiting practitioners from India and abroad⁶¹. NSD was to play a crucial role in this regard by presenting traditional forms in “improved and sympathetically edited form”, while avoiding their “forced modernisation” (SNA Proceedings, 1971 44)⁶². Within NSD’s pedagogical history, this coincided with including folk theatre forms as a crucial input in the NSD curricula, led most successfully by B.V. Karanth, who was also its director from 1977-82. By 1980, NSD was organising traditional theatre training workshops as part of its curricula in regional locations where traditional forms were known and practiced. Students stud-

⁶⁰ The other three parts of the scheme included development of the Akademi museum; research unit in the science of music; and fellowship for specialised training of teachers in music and dance (SNA, Annual Report 1971-72, 20). From 1975-76, two more programmes were added to the list of planned schemes: ‘Promotion and Preservation of Rare Forms of Traditional Performing Arts’ and the ‘Professional Repertory Company’ of the NSD.

Many folk theatre forms were documented from 1970 onwards and many more were added annually to an ever expanding list of forms that were identified by a committee as rare, languishing for want of patronage, and potentially useful for modern theatre. These forms were surveyed and documented in the form of film, tape-recordings and photographs. In 1970-71 the scheme began with ten forms and included *Ras Lila* of Mthura and Vrindavan, *Bhand* and *Naquals* of Lucknow, *Swang* from Haryana, *Bhavai* of Gujarat, *Bhand Pather* of Kashmir, and *Ramlila* of Ramnagar and Varanasi. Songs from Habib Tanvir’s productions of *Agra Bazaar* and *Mitti ki Gadhi* were also recorded. Several regional theatre forms like *Natya Sangeet*, *Yakshagana*, *Veedhi Natakam* were added in 1973; *Naacha*, *Jatra*, *Tamasha* in 1974 etc. By the end of 1980, many more forms had been added to the list.

⁶¹ As part of the Fourth Five-Year Plan, the Ministry of Education instituted a scholarship scheme to students and gurus for specialised training in music, dance and drama which was continued and overseen as a scheme of the Akademi in the Fifth Five-Year Plan.

⁶² The NSD, which had been set up and funded by the SNA since 1959, continued to receive its financial grant from the parent institution that constituted a significant proportion of the latter’s total spending. In 1975, NSD was registered as an autonomous organization under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860 and accorded an independent status, fully financed by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. In 1971, its allocation was Rs 4,85,000/-, which increased to Rs 6,96,000 in 1975 amounting to a total of 43.5% increase.

ied lifestyle related and sociological aspects of rural life and the role of theatre as a meaningful medium of creative communication. The focus remained on the use and relevance of these forms to the urban theatre practitioner as a resource in their own practice. The basis for the roots-thinking about tradition was the assumption that there existed a divide and conceptual time warp between 'modernity' of the 'present' and 'tradition' of the 'past' and that urgent institutional interventions could traverse this gap.

It was also in the early 1970s that several state-sponsored festivals became a regular feature of the SNA activities fulfilling the twin purposes of expanding the Akademi's reach and influence beyond Delhi as well as bringing as many regional forms and institutions into its framework of patronage as possible. Revival of Sanskrit theatre for contemporary audiences had already been institutionalised through the dedicated 'Kalidasa Festival' in Ujjain, instituted and sponsored by the Akademi in 1957. Its programming was intended to create a connection and dialogue between Sanskrit, folk, and contemporary theatre fulfilling SNA's ambition⁶³. This trend of facilitating, financially supporting, and showcasing productions of Sanskrit plays in Hindi or in any modern Indian language would continue well through the 1970s. Nandi Bhatia notes that between 1974-1986, many prominent theatre directors attempted to produce Sanskrit plays and perform them at festivals organised by SNA ('Introduction', xxii). At a meeting of the secretaries of state Sangeet Natak Akademies in 1972 (held in Panaji, 20-21 May) presided by

⁶³ A panel of eminent theatre personalities and experts was appointed to advise on restructuring the festival in 1973. It recommended that "in each *Samaroha* a play of Kalidasa or any other Sanskrit playwright should be performed in original Sanskrit, as per norms prescribed in Bharata's *Natya Shastra* in order to authentically reconstruct the ancient Sanskrit style" (Kalidasa Sanskrit Akademi, <https://www.kalidasacademy.com/kalidasa-samaroh/>, accessed online, July 3, 2021). It also suggested including the performance of a Sanskrit play in any of the Indian languages including Hindi, a production of a Sanskrit play in the *Lokdharmi* style in Hindi and a ballet based on either Kalidasa or some other Sanskrit classic. Performances of the traditional theatre or dance forms like *Koddiattam*, *Ankia Nat*, *Chhau*, *Kuchipudi*, *Yakshagana*, etc. were also to be featured in every festival since they were the living remnants of the ancient Sanskrit tradition.

Suresh Awasthi, secretary of the central SNA, it was decided that festivals of traditional and rare art forms, seminars and exhibitions, and documentation of folk art be decentered from Delhi and organised at the zonal level by the various state akademies, forging stronger links between state and central akademies and between various state akademies themselves. Theatre productions that employed indigenous theatre conventions and experimented with regional forms were selected and staged in these festivals and presented as the new trend in Indian theatre. The variety of forms and the use of music and movement helped overcome the problems of understanding performances in regional languages in these multilingual festivals.

The critical context for the Sixth Plan (1980-85) was the acute inflationary pressures, deterioration in the terms of trade and the balance of payments, and the set-backs to the economic functioning of critical sectors like agriculture, manufacturing etc. The Five-year Plan document, understands culture as people's ways of life and expression in the forms of "art, music, poetry, dance, and drama, including folk art" and integrates it with development (Sixth Five-Year plan document, Chapter-21). It is made a part of the "programme of human resources development" and incorporated into the system of education (ibid); Arts, themselves, were to be supported as "instruments of culture, education and national integration" and its main purpose was to promote our value system and cultural identity, national pride, and integration of its diverse groups and people (ibid). Commensurate with this vision of the Sixth Plan, SNA had streamlined its activi-

ties and created a policy programme for theatre (SNA Annual Report 1981-82, 5)⁶⁴. Patronage in the form of financial grants, fellowships for advanced training, and sponsored performances in festivals continued to remain a crucial part of its mandate. The Annual Report of SNA 1980-81, introduces a new area of intervention—"Development of Tribal Culture" through documentation and festival performances of forms of tribal music and dance⁶⁵ (4). While categories of 'folk', 'classical', and 'traditional' had already been part of the official discourse of culture since the Drama Seminar of 1956, the newest category to gain ascendance in use and popularity was that of 'tribal' culture. The token inclusion and representation of tribal art and performances, aspects of social life, musical instruments, costumes, and handicrafts of tribal communities in seminars, festival performances, and art-craft exhibitions in India and abroad came to stand in for any real participation and inclusion within the nation. Many of these exhibitions travelled to various cities in the UK and USA (1985) as part of the Festivals of India series beginning from 1982 onwards.

The 1980s also saw the Akademi's goal-focussed move towards the discourse of tradition through seminars and workshops that corresponded with policy initiatives that would actively promote its use in contemporary theatre practice. The Akademi convened a workshop on 'Contemporary Theatre Arts' from March 15-24, 1982 in Delhi by bringing together twenty-three em-

⁶⁴ The 1980-81 report articulates SNA's modified policy under four heads: 1) scientific documentation of all forms of music, dance, and theatre, particularly those genres that were fading out due to rapid socio-economic developments; 2) identification and sustaining talent in the sphere of music, dance, and drama through a programme of scholarships, fellowships, and grants at urban as well as tribal and rural levels. This included the scheme of 'preservation and promotion of rare forms' that had successfully sustained theatre forms like *Kudiyattam*, *Mudiyettu* etc.; 3) identification of forms of music, dance, and theatre which have been inspiring and aesthetically sustaining force in Indian society, and helping regional Akademies organise festivals; 4) festivals of puppetry and award of fellowships to young theatre workers to encourage innovation and creativity in theatre practice.

⁶⁵ This was followed by theatre festivals in Mokokchung (Nagaland), Jaipur (Rajasthan) and Obra (Mirzapur, UP) organised by SNA in collaboration with the state akademies in 1980-81.

inent theatre directors from all over the country⁶⁶, each of them representing a particular regional culture and demonstrating a distinct theatrical style that blended the traditional forms with modern techniques. The objective was to forge “closer contacts, interchanges, and pooling of experiences” of contemporary experiments, new trends, and practices in the use of traditional and folk forms (Report 1981-82, 26)⁶⁷. The central question in the seminar that followed the workshop demonstrations was that of adapting folk traditions in theatre for contemporary purposes. The practical demonstrations focussed on classical and folk elements of performance with respect to form, structure, gesture and musical expression, presentational techniques of movements, forms of acting, local slang and stylised articulation, use of classical architecture including playhouses, scenic design, and costumes. It was generally agreed that “authenticity of forms was inevitably lost while adapting them for the modern director’s purposes” (35). Many of those present questioned any purist view of traditional forms, using them selectively as inspiration or influence for varied theatrical purposes⁶⁸. Yet, the seminar concluded that for folk forms to be “effective” and “authentic”, they must not be lifted in bits and parts but adapted and used in their totality (ibid). The series of workshops and festivals that followed managed to locate the roots of Indian theatre firmly in classical and folk traditions, the exploration of and experimentation with which the

⁶⁶ The experts included theatre directors from diverse regions- Attili Krishna Rao (Andhra Pradesh), KN Panikar (Kerala), Govardhan Panchal (folk forms of Gujarat and Manipur), Kanhailal and Ratan Thiyam, Bansi Kaul, Prasanna (Samudaya, Karnataka), Rudra Prasad Sengupta, M.K. Raina, P. Kanappa Sambandam, S. Ramanujan, Jayadev Hattangady, Gurcharan Singh, D R Ankur and Mira Swaminathan.

⁶⁷ The Annual report of SNA, 1982, successfully claims about these workshops that its most fascinating aspect was “the willingness of the theatre directors to step outside the framework of their particular methods and forms and share, even actively participate, in the one time experiments of others” (26).

⁶⁸ For example, Bansi Kaul presented brief demonstrations from six of his productions that were theatrically inspired by traditional forms but did not seek to revive them. The main thrust in his productions was towards “evolving a theatre which is free in form and which can also create a new language to express the present ” (1971, 31). His presentation stressed on the ‘indissoluble link between form and content’, using traditional devices for his own theatrical purposes (ibid).

SNA was committed to defining and promoting⁶⁹. “The new theatre movement”, it was believed, “could only take shape and design if the distinct folk elements could be blended with contemporary sensibilities and themes” (Report 1982-83, 6). The search for a new language of modern theatre based on classical Sanskrit and traditional regional theatre forms was projected as a nation-wide movement, “dislodged the present in staking its claim over the nation’s art” (Guha-Thakurta, 2004, 176). The techniques, modes, and genres thus invented by SNA became the identifying markers of a modern theatre that it would promote and patronise thereafter.

An important intervention of the Akademi in popularising and patronising the agendas of the Roots Movement was the ‘Scheme for Assistance to Young Theatre Workers’ introduced in 1984. The Akademi’s attention towards young artists and art practitioners, a crucial constituency for building its credibility and outreach, as its representatives, stakeholders and beneficiaries, was not limited to theatre alone but also extended in the fields of music and dance. A series of Yuva-Utsavs (youth festivals) were initiated in 1985 with the objective of “scouting new talent, providing a platform and a new audience”, organised particularly in the non-metropolitan centres (1985-86, 2). The Annual Report 1977-78, references the views of the Akademi chairperson, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, on the “constitutional limitations” that preclude young performing artists to find a place on the Akademi’s decision making body, its general council and her suggestion to structure the Akademi’s programmes and projects so as to “generate a feeling among them

⁶⁹ This was followed by a 5-day long theatre workshop in Neenasam, Karnataka in October 1982, bringing together actors and directors from different districts of Karnataka and folk artists of remote areas. Performances, demonstrations and discussions on varied topics such as “Traditional theatre of the Untouchable” and “Modern Canada Theatre and its social relevance” were meant to “contribute to a better understanding between the traditional folk artists and the trained, educated theatre workers of the urban area” (Report 1982-83, 7). SNA financed and organised the Koodiyattam Festival in the temple of Irinjalakuda from 9-26 December 1982 where animated discussions happened on preservation and popularisation of this ‘rare form’. The discussions on tradition and history of street theatre (at the National theatre workshop on street theatre at Bharat Bhawan in Bhopal from 19-28 February, 1983) a link was established between traditional forms such as *Veethi natakam*, *Therukoothu* or *Patha Nataka* and the modern street theatre.

that the Akademi was their organisation and ... conscious efforts [be made] to help them find expression and fulfillment” (Annual Report 1977-78, Preamble, I). Young and upcoming theatre directors were promoted to develop new works inspired by folk/traditional performance forms of their respective regions. Preference was given to new productions of modern texts such that the relevance, usability, and timelessness of folk forms was reinstated. The significance and purpose of the scheme, as laid out in SNA’s Annual Report 1981-82, can be seen to be three-fold: firstly, to revive traditional rare folk theatre forms; secondly, to address and promote experiments with tradition by focussing on workshops-cum-research oriented productions, and finally, “to support and sustain the creative processes and energies of the young enterprising theatre worker” (33). The plan for the scheme also clarifies its intention “not to promote derivative art based on folk/traditional models, but to catalyse the growth of a theatre idiom enriched by indigenous theatrical experience” (SNA 1986-7, 39). While the Akademi had been invested in identifying and reviving folk and tradition through various modalities over the past two decades, its advances into the modern and contemporary had been limited so far. The question of contemporary culture has been a complex one with the SNA being reluctant towards recognising the ‘contemporary’ as a category of practice. This scheme and its language actively intervene in the contemporary by encouraging and rewarding those young and upcoming theatre makers who engage with folk forms as essential elements in their practice. These performances were first presented at the annual zonal festivals held in rotation in different states in collaboration with the state SNA or cultural department. If they performed sufficiently well at the state level, they were invited to perform at the National Festival in Delhi that would ensure their rise to prominence. This was a state-sponsored contemporary theatre that was ‘genuinely’ Indian, chasing away the ‘unfortunate’ spell that

Western dramaturgy had cast over it. The schematic support and financial assistance to young directors to explore and experiment with tradition cemented this trend and ensured its continuance by a younger generation of theatre makers. The first National Theatre Festival, representing selected performances from the zonal festivals, was held in December 1984 coinciding with the 'National Seminar on Perspectives of Contemporary Indian Theatre'. It was here that the use of 'classical', 'folk', and 'traditional' theatre was re-classified as 'theatre of Roots' and presented as a nation-wide Indigenous theatre movement. To support this activity at the regional/local level and project it onto the national stage in the annual Natya Samaroh in Delhi, the number of zonal cultural centres were increased from four in 1984 (North South, East, West) to five in 1985-86 and then to eight in 1986-87⁷⁰.

The twin developments of a state-prescribed national style defined in terms of its use of traditional performance and the dissemination of plays and productions developed in its wake through proliferating national and international festivals became a pivotal moment for the Roots Movement. It was, what G.P. Deshpande calls, 'ethno-theatre'—a combination of song, dance, physical movements, ritual, costume, myth, and spectacle that determine the creative and aesthetic choices in a theatre production rather than the concern for a well structured, dramatic experience (1992, 402). Critiqued primarily for its focus on style and the uncritical use of folk materials, 'theatre of roots' also supported and encouraged what many believed was superficial work at several levels, including in actor training (Mee, 204). The use of folk elements often became cliché, as in the *Ganesh Vandana* at the start of the performance, or in the imposition of folk

⁷⁰Rustom Bharucha critiques the cultural geography created by the zonal cultural centres with their arbitrary linking of states with zonal centres, centralisation of cultural activity and over-bureaucratized structure. He argues that this conflates rather than differentiate and specifies the nuances of 'preservation', 'innovation', 'dissemination', and 'projection' of folk and tribal arts that a concerned zone requires (1992, 1674-75).

forms like *Chhau*, *Nautanki* or *Tamasha* in performing Greek, Shakespearean or Brechtian texts where folk elements became “a glove or a coat to be put on and taken off at will” (Roy, 1995, 12). Safdar Hashmi’s critique of the scheme questions its fundamental assumption about Indian culture and identity, when he points out that, “Indianness cannot be a matter of form alone. It [must] be a matter of intention, of perception. ... A play cannot become Indian merely by looking Indian” (1989, 90). Many theatre directors and playwrights objected to the precondition of including folk traditions to qualify for the scheme and its promised support, following which, in 1989 the SNA excluded the specific requirement of including ‘folk’ elements in productions to avail the scheme. But it is noteworthy that the scheme also generated new theatre work by young and known directors and showcased it on the national stage, eventually offering opportunities to lesser known theatre artists from all over the country.

The preoccupation with reproducing folk and classical forms for the urban stage also became the basis for selection for and came to define the festival culture of the 1980s. The Akademi had already been organising, on behalf of the Ministry of External Affairs and/ or the Department of Culture, various cultural programmes of dance, music, and drama in honour of visiting heads of states and dignitaries of foreign countries since the 1970s. It had been the liaison institution between the central government and its various wings forging diplomatic ties with other countries and had been instrumental in creating transnational networks of exchange of traditional cultural forms. These new economic and geo-political alliances were built and cemented

on cultural exchange⁷¹. The recipe of folk/traditional and modern mix can then be identified as the curatorial basis for international festivals like the Festival of India, London (1982-83) that served the purpose of projecting the image of an ‘India Immortal’, “a particular image of India that was essentially synthetic and homogenised” to the world outside (Bharucha 1992, 1675). Within the nation’s boundaries, it harnessed the concurrent ability of cultural festivals to retain the broader imaginative possibilities of the nation as an integrated entity through national exhibits such as the series of events called the Apna Utsav (1985)⁷². Growing out of the ceremonial performances of the celebrations of independence, performing arts festivals in post-colonial nations like India have been used to present an idealised model of complex multicultural and multilingual societies by showcasing a diverse mix of regional cultural forms within a broad and homogenised curatorial framework. In their function as “models and mirrors” of the societies they are performed in, these festivals reflect an ethnic composition of the nation as well as pointing to a new model for the future (Don Handelman, 1998). Conceived by the then prime minister, Indira Gandhi, the festival events centre-staged folk art and performances as export items that backdated culture (Dalmia, 200). Arindam Dutta sees the project of Festivals of India as part of a larger marketing drive to introduce India to the highly industrialized G7 countries as a viable locale for investment (1997, 122). This became increasingly problematic in the context of evolving global power relations and structural re-adjustments of the mid-1980s, as “by *partially* staging as

⁷¹ In November 1973, a folk dance ensemble was established in Delhi on the directive of the Prime Minister’s Office for which SNA was to be the administrative body in-charge. The purpose was to keep folk traditions alive and check their deterioration as well as present the rich image of a variety of folk music and dance to audiences in India and abroad (SNA Annual Report 1973-74, 39-49). In 1978, the Akademi organised its largest single cultural show, a fifteen-day festival of Soviet art and culture at various centres—Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Lucknow, Chandigarh, Udaipur, Ranchi, and Bokaro (SNA Annual Report 1977-78, 20)

⁷² Similar festivals were held in France and the USA in 1985 in collaboration with their respective governments. A committee was set up by the Government of India under Smt. Pupul Jayakar was its chairman and SNA was tasked to select the performers for the various events included in the festivals.

fragment the spectacle of the village as a repository of culture, what gets covered over is the re-situating of the rural in the forefront of global exploitation” (Dutta, 1997, 133).

Theatre of Roots: Theoretical Underpinnings, Ideological Operations, Institutional Positions

An analysis of the experiments with folk carried out within and outside the state institutions remains beyond the scope of this research and has been included in many studies on modern Indian theatre (Mee, Erin B., 2008; Dharwadker, A.B., 2005; Deshpande, G.P., 1992; Kapur, A.; 1992). But it is crucial to point here that experiments with traditional performance spaces, breaking out of the proscenium had been underway since the early 1950s⁷³. The experiments in theatre making and playwriting in the 1960s and 1970s reflect a multiplicity of voices and offer multiple modes of engagement⁷⁴. Theatre practitioners as diverse as Panikkar, Habib Tanvir, Chandrashekhhar Kambar, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, and Satish Alekar, used traditional performance in the making of modern theatre, albeit with varied standpoints, agendas, and experiments. These were not borne out of the indigenous urge that defined the early post-independent years, articulated in the state institutional discourse on theatre. Rather, these were expressions of

⁷³ E. Alkazi used his terrace in Bombay as a performance area in the late '50s and later, after moving to Delhi as a director of the National School of Drama, explored an array of performance spaces from closed studios to the open-air Meghdoot Theatre. The work of Badal Sircar in Bengal departed from old theatre forms with a conscious ideology. Inspired by him, theatre-makers such as H. Kanhailal and L.Arambam began experimenting with the theatrical form, harnessing local traditions and martial art forms in performance. Habib Tanvir experiments since the mid-50s with the tribal *Nacha* performers of Chattisgarh at the Naya Theatre had already established the viability of using rural theatre forms, their thematic and formal flexibility, and the robust oral tradition to create a uniquely experimental theatre.

⁷⁴ Samik Bandyopadhyaya (1998) examines the work of directors like K.N. Panikkar, Habib Tanvir, B.V. Karanth and playwrights like Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Mohit Chattopadhyaya, Chandrashekhhar Kambar, Utpal Dutt, and many others working in different linguistic contexts who contributed to this phase of Indian theatre and identifies this a period of “renaissance of Indian theatre” (426). In his analysis, the best of these works went to the core of the folk forms and conventions they used to convey a “modern sensibility” at work, changing human relationships and explicating “a history of modern India through densely loaded texts” (427).

an alternate modernity that did not romanticise folk and traditional forms in any ahistorical and uncritical way. These theatre-makers/directors recognised the cognitive and aesthetic gaps in the traditional repertoire and intervened to infuse them with a modern consciousness and political understanding. The common thread that binds these experiments into a whole include the use of folk forms and their conventions. We also see a heady engagement with Brechtian plays and performance techniques in the work of many of its directors. The formalization and institutionalization of these varied styles under a common framework of 'Theatre of Roots', a term coined by Awasthi, would not have been possible without the interventions of the Akademi. Taking credit for launching the programmes for sponsoring traditional performances, festivals, and exhibitions in Delhi and other centres of SNA (during his term as secretary of the Akademi from 1965 to 1975), in 1985 Suresh Awasthi announced that the institutional recognition had created a movement "deeply rooted in regional theatrical culture, but cuts across linguistic barriers, and has a pan-Indian character in idiom and communicability" (1985, 86). The normative discourse of the roots based on Sanskritic categorisations found in folk and classical forms did not simply divert attention away from naturalist realist modes of presentation and performance. It also failed to acknowledge the ways in which affect, transformation, and stylisation worked to create a new and complex discourse and form of theatre that is beyond the binaries of text and performance, realism and stylisation. Moreover, the national platforms where 'the roots' discussions were staged did not allow for regional understandings, interpretations, and theatrical explorations to be discussed. The regions were where the overarching concerns for a theatrical contemporaneity were being discussed; it was the seminars, festivals, and policy pronouncements from New Delhi

that were creating a national form/ aesthetic. It is only by eliminating the former that the national self was instituted.

The dramatic, political, and aesthetic impact of the actual productions and stylistic practices of the period are examined in existing literature that focuses largely on play texts, interviews with artists and a review of manifestoes and articles by the proponents of the movement (Bharucha, 1993, 1995; Bhatia, Nandi, 2009 ; Dharwadkar, 2009; Dalmia, 2008). The only detailed book-length study on theatre of the roots has been done by Erin B. Mee (2008) who looks at the theatre practice of three of its representative practitioners—K.N.Panikkar, Girish Karnad, and Ratan Thiyam. Mee places the Roots Movement as part of the imagination and expression of Nehru's 'idea of India' and hence in a secular nationalist framework that redefined 'theatre' and 'modernity' for the Indian context. She offers the stages of maturation of the impulse to 'return to roots' into a movement and eventually a 'format' for national theatre. Her analysis credits the movement with making significant departures⁷⁵ from the manifestation of colonial modernity that defined theatre in terms of literary merit, secularist themes and ideas, commercialism, the ability to directly address social issues and its naturalistic acting and production style (2008, 19). The form of alternate cultural modernity so enacted, she argues, opposed not only colonial definitions, but also challenged the very terms of those definitions understood through strictly Western notions of reason, progress, and industrialisation. The use of Hindu mythological and historical texts and the use of traditional performance is aimed "not as a recollection of the past (socially or aesthetically) but as a renewal of the past, one that reconfigures the past as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present" (ibid, 28). Commem-

⁷⁵ This is achieved through alternate visual practices, performer-spectator relationships, dramaturgical structures and aesthetic goals that were distinct from colonial theatre.

taries such as Mee's ascribe to the Roots Movement a decolonizing politics that challenged colonial culture by "reclaiming the aesthetics of performance and by addressing the politics of aesthetics" (ibid, 5). Others deem it as quintessentially anti-modern, rejecting it as an alternate form of modernity. They argue that the tenets of European modernity that are sought to be subverted by the Roots Movement, are themselves by-products of a capitalist and imperialist context that are not applicable to the historical and political conditions specific to India. Dharwadkar sees the attempts to disclaim "colonial practices and by seeking to reclaim classical and other pre-colonial Indian traditions of performance as the only viable media of effective decolonization" as the "new traditional theatre" (Dharwadkar, 2005, 2). Rustom Bharucha sees it as an attempt to invent performance traditions, their genealogies as well as reinvent the very understanding of tradition itself as a generic timeless category, with its myths of a continuous tradition dating back to Hindu antiquity (1989, 1907-08). The use of plots, themes, and characters from Hindu mythology by roots directors and playwrights was rampant. This also worked at cementing the dominance and superiority of the Hindu race and a unified Aryan identity at a time when divisions within Indian elites on religious, regional, and caste lines were on the rise. Nandi Bhatia traces back this use of Hinduistic revivals to the rise in historical and mythological dramas post the DPA 1879, which consequently "fostered the simultaneous growth of a Hindu nationalism" (Bhatia, 2004, 50).

The assumptions about theatre and culture that lay the foundation for the Roots Movement were undoubtedly etched in an anti-Western aesthetic and driven by the urge to create a 'national theatre' that could constitute and reflect a national identity. This underlying purpose legitimized the movement and was in-turn institutionalised by the patronage received from the SNA. But it is important to separate the individual practices that comprise the core of the move-

ment from the political agendas of SNA that gave it institutional support, legitimation, and funding. This distinction is useful in accounting for the ways in which the institutional goals of the movement were often articulated “in ways that did not always accurately represent the perspectives of the artists” (Mee, 2008, 6). The opposition to Western text-based naturalism, dramaturgical structures, and plot-driven theatre became the sine qua non of the theatre of the roots as it matured from individual artists’ creative needs to an institutionalized theatre movement. At the level of theatre practice, the movement created a simplistic formula of theatre practice with mindless use of folk elements as a cultural commodity. It articulated the narrative of an urgent cultural and identitarian crisis in theatre that could only be resolved by outright rejection of Western modes of performance and replacing it with a national form invented from the hybridization of *Natyashastric* principles with localised indigenous tradition. What this created was a complete disregard for intra-form diversity, differences, and polyvalence of indigenous traditions to create a homogenous national culture that could claim what Bhabha calls “originary and initial subjectivities” (1994, 1). This was a move paradoxical to the urban theatre experiments that, on the one hand, used local or temporal subjects, and yet, felt compelled to Europeanise it using the principles of realism and naturalism. In the process many of these experiments created what was seen as culturally ‘uprooted’ theatrical forms. At the institutional level, the schemes and programmes of the Roots Movement re-asserted the homogenising tendencies of the state aimed at creating a national theatrical culture. This was achieved primarily through SNA’S policies that prescribed a style of theatre on the basis of which financial schemes and funding support were rolled out; translation and publication of play texts was commissioned; and a national cannon was created through state-sponsored theatre festivals. And yet, as many scholars claim,

the Roots Movement also nurtured and gave a concrete shape to the experiments of many practitioners who expressed a faith in the plurality of traditions and upheld local histories and region-specific theatre practices.

In his article, 'In Defence of the Theatre of the Roots' (1985), Awasthi advocates a "plurality of theatres: that combines "traditional and modern elements... where village and urban cultures exist both independently and in combination" ('Introduction', xxiii). But as Bharucha argues, it intended to yoke together such heterogeneous cultural practices and performance forms under its portal, "having to negotiate more than one self, more than one history, more than one language in the shaping of an intracultural narrative" (Bharucha, 2009, 78). The existence of "differentiated gradation of cultures' in tribal, rural, folk, ritual, *mofussil* (district town), urban and metropolitan contexts ... alive in different states of vibrancy, and different proximities to the process of modernization, industrialization, and secularization in India that is far from complete" (ibid., 79). The separation between traditional and rural from the modern and urban theatre forms was to mark their distinctness from the former, clearly identifiable from the latter metropolitan version, even while the intra-form diversity and polyvalence in the former disallowed any sweeping generalization about a localised indigenous tradition.

Search for Roots and the Problematic of Authenticity

The search for 'roots', which literally means a search for that which is to be found, discovered, even invented, from 'under-the-ground', or that which exists beyond the surface, ignores the concrete social and material realities on which the present stands, the ground from where the search for the absent/lost is launched. This looking back into the past for a lost tradi-

tion in a bid to revive its glory and reinstate its position at the cost of the present is akin to standing in the present without being awake and aware of its immediacy. Anuradha Kapur understands this as a “disenchantment with today’s world rather than as a stake in it” (1991, 12). The search for origins and clear paths of evolution freezes cultural forms in time, severing them from the social grounds of their appearance. It is a move away from the present, from the modern. As Kapur points out, “a denial of our own contemporaneity is denial also of the discrete temporality of forms; a loss of vigilance about their transitions. For forms live, decline and dramatically transform themselves; they do not by any means remain eternally youthful” (1991, 11)

The idea of roots is connected to authenticity, that, in terms of Indian theatre, signals the question of identity via antiquity and indigeneity. It is an important site on which tradition and modernity have been debated and reformulated in post-colonial cultures. Authenticity was constituted under colonial rule as the ground from which to recover traditions, a legitimate cultural past and heritage, as against the messy contradictions of the contemporary. When used in the context of traditional Indian theatre it connotes the ritualistic, mythic, symbolic, and codified, non-mimetic theatre that uses stylised forms of movement, speech, and declamation. In terms of modern theatre, authenticity came to stand in for a range of styles, customs, and modes of presentation—ritualised and codified performance; the spontaneous, improvised, and loosely structured theatre in the open; the experimental non-verbal theatre that maybe physicalised through the use of dance; musical theatre; and the well made play performed within the realistic grammar. This variety and range of theatre practices may all be deemed authentically ‘Indian’, in one way or another. However, despite this expanse of what may count as ‘modern’, it does not help unpack the dynamism and change of theatre traditions, or performative differences between spe-

cific forms, whether traditional or modern. Like all colonial categories, authenticity boxes and freezes approaches, customs and people into a manageable mass that homogenises forms. It also defines them in terms of generalised similarities, abstracted from their specific histories. Authenticity thereby becomes a measure of genuineness and purity, adding cultural, ideological, and political value to the objects it is ascribed. This manufactured tradition and its history marks forms as authoritatively ‘Indian’ without necessitating an examination of their historicity, processes of cross-pollination, and change and hybridisation over time, forestalling the possibility of their contemporary interpretation or evaluation.

Additionally, the logic of authenticity marginalises the folk performer by disregarding the immediacy of the changing social contexts of performance. By fixing the characteristics associated with the folk performer, authenticity dislodges the form from its bearer. Anuradha Kapur discusses the qualities associated with the folk performer—spontaneity, improvisation and energy, as well as language of the ritual that Indian drama invented for itself and points that, “... once the folk performer is thus stereotyped, the possibilities of manoeuvre are sucked away; it become difficult to speak about the tragic, the sinister, the problematical” (1991, 11). This essentializing of the folk and tribal performer’s vitality and stamina generates an abstract notion of energy frozen in the folk, deflecting it from the harsh realities of village life and townspeople and works to “preclude the possibility of change and protest” (ibid). It is worth asking if the theatre that displays essential qualities of the performer can adequately represent contemporary challenges of migration, unemployment, disruption of life patterns, livelihoods accruing from processes of uneven modernisation, and stage possibilities of change.

Furthermore, the vocabulary of ritual in this decontextualized theatre is far away from the shared experience of participation in the ritual itself. In most of these performances, no authenticity of ritual can be established in any way. It is only 'a sense' of the ritual that is harnessed and manifested in a modern proscenium context rather than its real-time processual and transformative unfolding. The knowledge and modes of involvement and interpellation thus achieved are far removed from the ritualised social and cultural context and may make little sense for an urban audience. Therefore, the move towards 'folksy' performances that affix ritualistic and idealised characteristics upon the 'folk' performer and their theatre in order to energise the modern urban theatre, transforms into a move away from any meaningful engagement with ritual contexts of these forms. It is also coterminous with the non-functional and ornamental use of folk and traditional material, with traditional performers serving the consumerist purpose of entertaining audiences in limited, patronising, and uncritical ways.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to offer a detailed account of the foundational years of Sangeet Natak Akademi's cultural policy discourse and practice. Within the broad canvas of genres and cultural expressions that get clubbed under the 'arts and culture' category in public policy discourses, the current research concerns itself with the field of theatre and theatrical production. The period under examination, 1953-1985, encapsulates the early years of institutionalisation of culture with the state as the sole benefactor and arbiter of the arts. It has been foundational to the ideological and programmatic basis of an otherwise unstated national cultural policy. This study maps the colonial and national contexts that have historically governed policy actions, patronage, and state intervention constituting theatre as a field and subject of policy making. The purpose of this concluding chapter is twofold: firstly, to extrapolate from the discussions and findings of this study key insights into the complex and contradictory positions and actions of an unstated institutional policy and secondly, to direct attention towards select issues that can help bridge the gap between policy-making and its implementation in theatre.

Historical Imbalances and Gaps

For the purpose of this study, a crucial question has been whether the Indian state's approach towards culture, specifically in the domain of theatre and performance practice, has been ideologically and technically similar to the use of techniques of power and control exercised by the colonial state. I contend that even though technically, as forms of governmentality, they were different, there are several ideological continuities with colonial cultural governance. The continued use of draconian laws of censorship (DPA 1876) and imposition of entertainment taxes

were two control and regulatory mechanisms where the nation-state continued using the same techniques of power used by the British. The intervention of SNA in abrogating them has been limited, incomplete, and has remained technical in nature, i.e., critiqued in theory, but continuing in practice. Alongside this, Culture was bracketed with education to deliver developmental goals. The existing pre-modern relations between marginalised communities of performing artists and traditional power structures were manipulated by the independent nation state to secure legitimacy for its developmental role and a tradition-centered approach to arts funding through an arm's length approach was pursued. An elaborate system of patronage was instituted through financial grants, support schemes, awards, recognition, and state-funded theatre festivals, which continue till date, even if in a somewhat archaic fashion. The basis for what can best be described as an amorphous cultural policy has been a mixed bag of techniques. This included state control and patronage and inclusion of culture into planning and state budgetary allocation, however their dispersal was under the discretion of centralized institutions.

While cultural institutions like SNA have continued to extend support to an increasing array of forms and genres of performing arts, many incongruous margins have been created. The invention of an authentic 'Indian' culture through forms of institutionalization has been a largely urban exercise. This is borne out of urban and middle class nostalgia for tradition and culture, but equally out of the metropolitan ignorance of complex performance histories and cultural practice that developed in different regions away from urban centres. Cultural elite located in central cultural institutions, audiences, and often the city-artists themselves remain disconnected from rural and base level cultural practitioners and bearers of traditional forms. The barest illustration of this has been the decontextualized and commodified displays of rural and tribal cultural forms as

well as stagings of classical arts as the essence of Indian culture in national and international festivals. This is a gap that a formal cultural policy, if existent, would have been expected to bridge. Though culturally diverse, performing communities in India have historically been socially and economically in the same place across the country over time. A majority of performance cultures continue to be practiced by those belonging to backward classes, minority communities and lower castes groups. The constituencies of the popular, the amateur, and performances of those on social margins of the society have remained outside state edifices that have addressed only officially recognised forms and exponents. None of these voices find articulation in official documents, either as representatives in/of cultural institutions or as beneficiaries of state's patronage. Ironically, mass reception of cultural forms has been seen as a criteria for outcasting popular forms and performers from official recognition, support, and from cultural discourse itself. The otherwise comprehensive and independent review reports commissioned by the department of culture whose critique and recommendations remain largely unheard and unimplemented, have also failed miserably in including the subaltern artist in consultative processes of institutions and their policy deliberations. For all the currency given to the discourse of authenticity in policy thinking—in terms of cultural forms and in ways of seeing them—there has been no serious attempt to let the 'authentic voice' of the artist from submerged socio-economic classes be heard or registered in official policy debates. Inevitably represented and spoken for by urban artists, cultural 'specialists', or bureaucrats and described in terms that describe the state of the 'art forms' rather than the 'bearer' of the form, the unmissable metropolitan bias of these reports has disallowed the articulation of the problem in terms of lives, livelihood, and security.

Furthermore, the system of government funding continues to be seen through the constricted feudal notions of patronage that have failed to translate into a system of public support for the arts. The implicit relationship between the artists and society has been transformed from one between the dependent position of a subject/*protégé* and his royal benefactor/venerable master in a feudal and paternalistic context to the beneficiary of a new economic and political system led by the constitutional liberal state and an increasingly capitalistic market. While the autocratic epoch demanded loyalty in exchange of social and economic security, the liberal democratic state provides no social support structure for artists/artisans even as it continues to appropriate their art for purposes of nation-building and nationalistic image-building for itself. Over-bureaucratized institutional structures, arduous processes of seeking infrastructural support, and financial assistance or welfare schemes have constructed a national bureaucracy for culture that often replicates its colonial predecessor in its ideological biases and impenetrably complex delivery mechanisms. The thinking about the role of the state in the arts has been driven largely by inherited notions of unique cultural ancestry, excellence, and canonization that have crystallized around particular cultural ‘forms’ and individual ‘artistic genius’, detached from socio-political processes. Despite being the province of the Ministry of Education for so long, neither is the cultural field seen as a knowledge domain nor the practice and appreciation of arts as a valuable public good. As Rustom Bharucha notes, the transition from traditional modes of royal patronage to that of a democratic state has resulted in an “increasing anonymity between artists and the larger power system in which they are placed” (1992, 1675-76). It has been neither fruitful for the arts nor for maintenance of artists themselves. It has also impeded the full and fair application of constitutional provisions that delineate cultural rights of language, script, religion, and communi-

ty-based practices for all. Though present in spirit in the constitution, the historic concerns of ameliorating social backwardness, poverty, caste, and class related marginalisation not only remain unaddressed in initiatives and directives of cultural institutions, but the absence of a definitive policy outline on culture in fact obfuscates these issues.

Since Indian independence, many performance practices, social-cultural groups, and institutions have been restructured and brought into the state network of recognition and support. In the process, regional/local traditions were thoroughly decontextualized and aesthetically transformed to fit within the national mainstream, while many cultural practices not seen to embody the nation's cultural identity continue to either remain unrecognised or grossly undervalued. Contemporary theatre forms that defy easy categorisation and do not sit comfortably with the agendas of the developmental state—experimental and technology driven new media performances and interdisciplinary and cross-cultural formations that concern themselves with the fast changing cultural contexts—remain peripheral to the state's policy thinking and structures of patronage. Interestingly, the Lalit Kala Akademi (Academy of Fine Arts) has been able to develop a focus on art as a modern medium exploring a range of fine art traditions available in tangible forms. Sangeet Natak Academy's exclusion of the modern and contemporary continues to centre on obsolescent institutional positions. The observation of the High Powered Committee on the Akademies (2014) articulates the resistance to change and innovation. The report observes,

Given the autonomous position that the Akademis do broadly enjoy, why have their mandates not been reflected upon, and refreshed, even though two generations have passed since they were set up? Is it because they are too 'ancient' to understand that there are

new areas of creative work, which technology and inventiveness have produced? Or is it merely governmental apathy? Or is it unnecessary Government intervention? (HPC Report, 2014, 23)

An increasingly interventionist state approach towards arts and cultural institutions has ensured over-bureaucratisation of decision-making processes and politicisation of culture. Despite the institutional extensions towards cultural expressions, the domain of performing arts remains under distress, persistently suffering from crises of inclusivity, opportunity, centralisation, autonomy, and contemporaneity. The field of culture itself remains marginalised when seen within the larger public policy discourse. This has been amply demonstrated in the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic that has threatened the lives and livelihoods of many artists and their families. The absence of a cultural policy and the limited, feudal discourse of arts patronage has exacerbated the need for a viable social support system for artists in the form of social security schemes like pension, loans, and health insurance.

Sangeet Natak Akademi: Institutional Anomalies

SNA's history and policies of foundational years have repeatedly claimed classical and other pre-colonial Indian traditions of performance as a distinct means of decolonizing the theatre of its colonial past. This is not unique to the Indian context or to the performing arts alone. These extreme forms of decolonisation, common in other parts of the postcolonial world, especially in the Africas, have been based on the assumption that post-colonial cultures were 'natural' and holistic entities that had been repressed, their pasts cut off by colonialism. The shift towards folk and traditional forms uses this premise to discredit the histories of cross-fertilisation of tradi-

tional genres and colonial cultural forms through exchange, appropriation, and adoption of texts, techniques, aesthetics, and politics, thereby providing a convenient axis around which the modern and the national can be reconciled. The language and preference for ‘folk’ that dominates the official cultural discourse often, mistakenly, sees this ‘invented’ culture as authentic ‘people’s’ culture that must be preserved at all cost. The association of these ‘folksie’ forms to practices of people, ordinary folk, has been a mirage of modernity and cultural policy making in modern India. It does not account for the ways in which postcolonial worlds have been established as multiple and diverse “realities for knowledge” implicated in colonial and European orders of knowledge as much as in local ones (Mudimbe, 1988, xi). Neither does it consider the processes of ‘Indianisation’ of colonial forms through the elements of the popular theatrical tradition in India such as music, song, colour, pathos, melodrama, and the histrionic delivery of lines (Bharucha, 1989,1907). The distinctions created between rural/traditional/oral/folk performances and urban/modern/written/theatre in the official discourse do not hold as clear cut or as absolute as the policy pronouncements and discussions on folk theatre practices make it appear. The post-independence attempts to define an ‘authentic’ Indian theatre as rooted in traditional performance, leaves out the complex imbrications of form with contemporary realities, the demands of audiences, aesthetic trends, and choices of the time, as well as their historicity. Within theatre practice, and by no means limited to it, this manifested in valorising proposals of the *Natyashastra*, the source book for various aspects of Sanskrit theatre production. These prescriptions were to be practiced, experimented with, and mastered in order to reconstruct authentic Indian play-texts and production styles lost due to the prolonged history of colonialism and its attendant cultural dominance. The reclaiming of lost histories and archaic cultural practices dating back to antiquity was meant

to affix the relationship of the classical to the modern and the national. The folk forms were seen as vestiges of a once flourishing classical tradition. As nationalist notions of culture guided by the impulse to decolonise and develop, rejected the colonial and the contemporary, they simultaneously “appropriated the folk through inter-colonization, functioning under neocolonialism” (Prakash, 2010, 178). The link between the classical Sanskrit stage and the provincial forms of the vernacular were thus determined; the (nationalist) desire to approximate the former was to be realised through using the artistic resource of the latter. Cultural institutions like SNA have often been accused of being partisan towards high-culture and classical brahmanical forms of theatre and performance, leaving out the contemporary, the kitsch, and the digital. Interestingly, all calls for recovery and revival of forms critique and exclude aspects that contemporise and popularise these forms, generating comfortable categorisation of traditions for which, historically and analytically, processes of change, renewal, and innovation have been innate.

Furthermore, the responsibility of recovering artistic and cultural practices including indigenous languages through revival, re-evaluation, and recuperation in India have been the duty of the modern ‘artist’. The traditional performer remains at the receiving end of meagre state patronage and social support. The separation of forms from their bearers, the isolation of performance from its social-material contexts, and the gap between policy makers, their actions from the needs of the intended beneficiaries have continued to widen. The context within which the institutional system functions, the economic and socio-political environment in which policies are articulated and enacted, is overwhelmed by colonial legacies and reduced to cultural abstractions of national development and nation-building. Institutions like SNA that are mandated to act upon the arts and matters of culture, are not only small and alienated from the larger cultural life

of people that exists beyond theatre auditoria, museums, and seminar halls but also lack the expertise to negotiate complex phenomena of cultural production, distribution, and consumption. They are also not particularly old or resilient structures and remain ill-equipped in terms of regulatory instruments, legal frameworks for funding and protection of artists, and incentives.

The Approach Paper on the National Culture Policy, 1992 prepared by the Department of Culture (located at the time in the Ministry of Human Resource Development) was the first attempt to highlight the dissonance between government funding in culture and evaluate the performance of its institutions despite no official document formulating its policy. The approach paper was meant to detail “a blueprint for areas which need urgent attention and public support” and cautioned against proclaiming “any single direction or ideological orientation or prescribe(ing) any standards in culture...” (Department of Culture, 1992, section 3.1). Even though the document never translated into any concrete legislative outcome, it is significant for the observations it makes. It notes that the government spending on culture was a miniscule portion (0.11%) of its annual expenditure on development over the last thirty-five years (roughly approximating 6,00,000 crores), neither commensurate with social needs for cultural activities and cultural needs of people nor with their stated value to developmental goals as professed in government accounts (IFACCA, WorldCP-Asia International Database of Cultural Policies, 2013⁷⁶, 61). The High Powered Committee on the functioning of the Akademies, 2014 reiterates this issue and recommends substantial increase in annual allocation to the arts (HPC Report, 2014, 34). More importantly, it points to problems in management of finances and disbursal of funds that is often staggered and arbitrary with impractical regulations to return the ‘unspent bal-

⁷⁶ See IFACCA, “WorldCP-Asia International Database of Cultural Policies”, 1st edition 2013.

ance' of funds released late in the first place. This is seen as "means to control, even crunch spending" of an institution that is autonomous and must deserve the attention and freedom to spend on activities in a manner and time frame that schemes and art projects require for maturation and implementation (ibid).

The plethora of theatre practice that has developed in post-independence India, albeit unevenly across regions, localities, and languages offers a contradictory view of what might constitute Indian theatre and questions the nature of institutional intervention and patronage. The material-institutional conditions that regulate the field of theatre today can be traced back to the concerns expressed in the various Akademi seminars and their recommendations (1956, 1961, 1971) that this study highlights. Several review committee reports since then have exposed the inherent structural imbalances of policy and its implementation in these institutions (Homi Bhabha Committee report (1964), G.D. Khosla Review Committee Report (1972), Haksar Committee report (1990), and Draft Approach Paper on National Cultural Policy (1992)). These documents raise issues of centralisation of policy-making, functional autonomy within the institutional space, participation of artists in decision-making and implementation processes, and, regular review, critical appraisal and accountability of institutions. The Haksar Committee has been unequivocal in its critique of politicisation of cultural institutions that threatens to subvert all institutional efforts of democratising culture. It observes that, "In several states the chairpersons of the Akademis are political personalities, and there are also other factors which tend to encroach upon the freedom of the institutions. Though constituted as autonomous bodies, many of them seem ... to be functioning as limbs of the state governments" (1990, 29). It proposes minimal state intervention in functioning of cultural institutions, policy making for the arts, and cultural production in general.

The proceedings of these reports offer a substantive critique of cultural governance, its top-down approach and the ad-hocism of the policy making process, and yet have remained largely untended and ignored.

For any scholar of cultural institutions, it is an unignorable and unfortunate fact that culture, from the very inception of state planning, has been classified under various ministerial and organisational heads, acquiring its own departmental base in 1971 and a full ministerial berth only in 2001. This has resulted not only in confusion and lack of effective coordination between the activities of various agencies with differing agendas in the states and the Centre, but has also led to obscuring the real challenges and potentialities of theatre practice. As the conventional portfolio 'Art and Culture' continued to shuttle between different state agents (ministries and institutions at different levels of central, state, and local government) and domains of action (such as Scientific Research and Culture Affairs, Education, Youth Affairs, Tourism, etc.)⁷⁷ its institutional location or accountability underwent change, albeit only in technical terms. Between shifting definitions of art and culture under each governmental head, mostly in limited instrumental terms, the value and role of cultural practice and its relationship to people and social contexts never stabilised.

There has been a significant alienation between the various central institutions that administer the arts in India. The ad hoc division of roles and responsibilities of these governmental bodies and the lack of effective coordination of their activities has created an overly managed, under-developed, and incompetent state apparatus for culture. ICCR (estd. in 1950), the cultural

⁷⁷ Its longest station in these thirty years of shuttling between ministries, 'culture', was under the Ministry of Human Resource Development for about fourteen years from 1985-1999. Following this between the years 2000-06 the department shuttled intermittently between the Ministry of Tourism and Culture and the Ministry of Culture six times, only once to be clubbed under the Ministry of Culture, Youth Affairs & Sports in 1999.

wing of the Ministry of External Affairs, was created with complete financial and logistical assistance from the Government of India to forge strategic relations with other countries through policies and programmes (national and international) for cultural and educational exchange. It has since been responsible for selecting, empanelling, and funding artists for travel and performance abroad, a task that may be best suited to be carried out by artists and/or institutions like SNA that engage with the arts at regional, local, and national levels. Bearing in mind the need to strategically manage representation of a national image commensurate with national priorities on a global scale, this has been an intensely political task to perform. The core of ICCR's activities include implementation of schemes for artists and art students; organisation of exhibitions, seminars, and art festivals; exchange of groups of performing artistes, participating in international arts and cultural festivals; and selecting, organising, and coordinating 'Festivals of India' in other countries. The process of selection of these events has often been critiqued for their lack of artistic rationale, excessive bureaucracy, inherent institutional values of aesthetics, and unconscious institutional bias. The criteria for programming artists and artistic forms that would represent India abroad has remained dominated by the classical and folk forms, leaving out the modern, the kitsch, the experimental, and contemporary. Similar to this has been the functioning of zonal centres that are responsible for selecting folk artists for performing at the annual Republic Day Folk Dance Festival. These two significant instances of institutional performance demonstrate the contradictory impulses, lack of coordinated activity and application of non-artistic criteria in selection processes that have undermined creativity, artistic freedom, and status of the artist themselves.

The question of cultural rights has always been a contentious one in India. As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, cultural rights fit neither within the framework of fundamental rights nor DPSP and are guaranteed under international declarations and treaties primarily the UNESCO Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966). Culture has historically been thought within the context of the developmental ideology of the postcolonial state, a way of empowering, privileging, and legitimizing the state and accomplishing its developmental goals (which are themselves defined in economic terms). But as Satish Deshpande argues, the notion of development in emergent post-colonial societies is not just about a set of economic policies or processes; rather, it relates to “crucial mechanisms that enable a national collectivity to be imagined into existence” (1998, 149). It was the emergent middle classes and urban elite that came to occupy positions of power and privilege as managers of the developmental state and place holders for culture. These positionalities are intricately linked to economic rights and the historically embedded structures of caste, class, and gender.

As I have noted elsewhere, the decades of 1960s and 70s offer a “complex and contradictory” view of the role of state in the performing arts—on the one hand, persisting policy related challenges of equity and access, cultural entitlement, and social inclusion are articulated outside of the Akademi (IIAS’s seminar on Cultural Policy, Shimla 1974) while on the other, the very belief in the Nehruvian idea of India is eroded by perceptions of cultural elitism of its institutions (Bharadwaj, 2019, 66). The 1980s and 90s saw an ascendance of the notion of cultural rights over economic rights. The latter can be contextualised in a social milieu where Nehruvian state-

centered economic developmentalism had lost its legitimacy and persuasion (1998, PE 11)⁷⁸. Deshpande examines the discourse of cultural rights in relation to the invisible workings of ‘cultural capital’—a concept that mobilises both culture and economics and addresses the ways in which benefits, knowledge, and tastes are passed on intergenerationally, much like historically embedded structures of exclusion (1998). Access to and consumption of culture, perceived in this light, are neither easily regulated by the state nor willingly accepted by hegemonic institutions and classes that benefit from it. Within the context of an exceedingly aggressive and intolerant state and the waning of its developmental role, cultural rights (or the lack thereof) have become even more pronounced. They have come to be seen in relation to questions of autonomy, equity and access, participation, and inclusivity.

Recent Assertions

The centralised planning system driven by Nehruvian socialism was scrapped in 2017 by the Government of India and the Five-Year Plans ended with the 12th Plan. It was replaced by the Three-Year Action Plan of the newly formed NITI Aayog whereby the states can devise schemes and allocate funds in keeping with their needs and vision⁷⁹. In the Three Year Action Agenda of the NITI Aayog, 2017-2020, that followed, culture does not appear as a separate cate-

⁷⁸ Deshpande, Satish. “Current Impasse in Language of Rights: Questions of Context”. *Economic and Political Weekly*, (Jan. 31 - Feb. 6, Vol. 33, No. 5, 1998), pp. PE11-PE15.

⁷⁹ The system of five year national plans with federal government schemes, allocations of funds to states, and categorisation of expenditure into plan and non-plan heads gave way to a more dispersed system of planning under the newly formed NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog. As a body comprising the Prime Minister as its Chairperson and Chief Ministers of several states as Members, the NITI Ayog has been conceptualised as a think tank whose role is limited to advising the state governments rather than any real financial power or control over state government’s spending. In its advisory capacity, the Niti Ayog is tasked with providing a fifteen-year vision document and a seven-year National Development Agenda for the nation to meet its long-term developmental and social sector objectives. This has largely been attributed to the limitations of the top-down approach to planning and a step towards a decentralised development process.

gory but finds a mention under ‘Education and Skill Development’, a subcategory of the social sector. The emphasis in the category of ‘Art and Culture’⁸⁰, once again, is the notion of cultural heritage refracted through the lens of civilizational history and tradition. The overarching context now is not development or nation-building but rather globalisation of art and heritage. This move was heralded by UNESCO’s lists of tangible, intangible, and knowledge resource heritage that brought cultural practices, heritage tourism, and management within the ambit of corporate investment as a vision for global culture⁸¹. NITI Aayog’s Action Agenda (2017-18 to 2020-21), focuses on “skill development” and “skill mapping” to enable protection of culture and creation of commercially viable jobs and livelihood (NITI Aayog, 2017, 141-42). Not only does the document not detail any methods of undertaking this extensive mapping exercise that has already been on-going at several institutions supported by the Ministry of Culture, including the SNA, it also leaves outside its framework the many forms of contemporary culture that may have substantially altered the traditional performing arts. The practitioners of ‘endangered’ forms, whose support and protection was driven by the cultural logic of the 1960s and 70s in a welfare state context, are now human resources in the new priorities of a neo-liberal state. No longer considered subjects of welfare, they are now service providers, enfolded within a framework of eco-

⁸⁰ 2019-20, the Ministry of Culture allocation to Akademies to support their activities was Rs. 339.26 crore, increased from Rs. 339.27 in 2018-19 while expenditure under the separate ‘Art and Culture’ category under developmental heads was Rs. 2387.40 crores as opposed to Rs. 2458.60 in the previous year. This provision included expenditure of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, Sahitya Akademi, Lalit Kala Akademi, National School of Drama, Centre for Cultural Resources and Training, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Kalakshetra Foundation, and the seven Zonal Cultural Centers. The total-establishment expenditure of the Centre towards the Ministry of Culture in 2019-20 was Rs. 1243.99, increased marginally from Rs. 1227.04 in 2018-19.

⁸¹ Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (CSICH) in 2003, and UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in 2005, to which India became a signatory in 2007

conomic utility whose return is quantified in relation to their economic contribution to the growth of the nation.

The mission document of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India (2017-2020) also proposes an elaborate agenda of a “National Mission on Cultural Mapping” to create an objective database of cultural ‘assets and resources’ including forms and artists across genres, cultural organisations, spaces, heritage monuments, cultural festivals, etc. (2017, 4). The understanding has been that the data collected from anthropological activities of documenting, recording, and synthesising knowledge on cultural forms, undertaken by SNA so far, would now be instrumental in classifying the cultural economy in terms of an “assets and resources” criteria. It is claimed that this would help artists define themselves in terms of their “cultural identity, vitality, sense of place, and quality of life” and be useful for planning and policy making purposes (ibid., 5). The document proposes that all schemes, grant/scholarship/fellowship/award processes, etc. of the Ministry of Culture shall be processed online through the NCWP (National Cultural Working Place), with which they would be integrated. The mechanisation of financial activities and electronic disbursement of funds comes with the promise of an effective and timely delivery mechanism that reaches its intended and deserving artists/institutions. These developments must be seen in the backdrop of the state-supported rise of financial technologies, and the country’s national ID project, the Aadhaar, that seeks to affix identity permanently and make rigid classifications that depend on opaque technologies. Ultimately, these strategies of collecting, preserving, and classifying data fall back upon older anthropological notions of culture, away from the framework of aesthetics or social-political relevance of culture, making cultural policy processes

subservient to the ebbs and flows of neo-liberal capital led by the internet and controlled by increasingly authoritarian governments.

The question of exclusivity of the cultural discourse has been repeatedly asserted in urban elite and middle class articulations against a written cultural policy. For the longest time, the creation of a ministry of culture was also disapproved, fearing governmental control over cultural agendas, programmes, and funds. One of the prime dangers of having a unitary cultural policy for the nation has been the speculation around governmental domination and manipulation of the arts and conversely the issue of insulating cultural activity from political influence. The question of autonomy from political control or interference has never been a simple one or one of formal pronouncements alone but rather needs to be qualified and contextualised. Within the Indian context, the use of an arm's length approach of the state towards funding cultural activity has only partly helped keep arts away from political ebbs and flows. Government selection and appointments of administrators and artists to decision-making positions in cultural institutions continues in a backhanded fashion. It has often been critiqued for reflecting aesthetic and ideological interests of upper caste, upper class urban intelligentsia who tend to offer top-down notions of culture, its uses, and prescriptions for cultural interventions. Keeping the government at an arm's length from the arts has also meant the complete marginalisation of the arts from governmental attention and sustained action. While the fears of losing autonomy and the freedom of speech and expression are not entirely misplaced, given, especially, the history of Emergency in India (1975-77) and the more recent communalisation of culture and politics by the Hindu-right, what remains unattended in questions of policy making are the institutional forms of patronage, governance and control that have and continue to act in the cultural domain. The articulation of this

unstated policy and its historical development foregrounds those cultural actors who have remained at the periphery of state cultural edifices and systems of support. It also opens the possibility of engaging critically with assumptions about history, tradition, modernity, and culture and allows an articulation of those elements of an informal and implicit policy that may not be desirable or practical anymore.

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