

Negotiating Modern and the Folk: A Study of Habib Tanvir's Select Plays

A Dissertation Submitted to Central University of Haryana

for the Partial Fulfilment of the

Degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY



BY

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2017

DECLARATION

I, Neha Rana, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled “**Negotiating Modern and the Folk: A Study of Habib Tanvir’s Select Plays**” submitted to Department of English and Foreign Languages, Central University of Haryana in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree Master of Philosophy in English is a record of original and independent research work done by me during the period of 2016 to 2017 under the supervision and guidance of Dr Bir Singh Yadav, Associate Professor and it has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree/ Diploma/ Associateship/ Fellowship or any other similar title in this University or any other University.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled “**Negotiating Modern and the Folk: A Study of Habib Tanvir’s Select Plays**” submitted to Department of English and Foreign Languages, Central University of Haryana, Mahendragarh in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master in Philosophy in English is a record of original work done by Ms. Neha Rana, Roll No. 8140 under my supervision and guidance. This dissertation has not been submitted in part or full for the award of any other Degree/ Diploma of this university or any other institution.

I deem the research work fit for being evaluated.

Place: Mahendragarh

(Bir Singh Yadav)

Date:

(Supervisor)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Nothing is complete without appreciation and gratitude, neither us nor our work. Akbar ordered for Taj Mahal to be built, painters painted beautiful scenes and students wrote acknowledgements. First and foremost I would like to pay my regards to my family elders for they have been my partners since the time of my inception. I thank S.S Rana, Raj Singh Rana and Sushma Rana for always making me realize importance of education. I am grateful to my mother, Shashi Rana, for her unconditional love.

I offer my respect to my supervisor, Dr. Bir Singh Yadav for he readily always helped me whenever I approached Sir. I also want to express appreciation for my teachers, Rinu ma'am, Dr. Sanjeev Sir, Dr. Snehsata ma'am, Sudeep Sir and Dr. Manoj Sir for providing me guidance in my academics. I thank all my teachers from earlier stages of my life for they have played a crucial role in my life.

I convey my deeply felt emotions of love and appreciation for my Lord Shiva for whenever I got into state of despair I found courage and joy through him. I thank my senior, Shankar Lal Choudhary for guiding me in matters related to MLA and Alok for helping me with matters related to printing and binding of this dissertation. Last but not the least, I owe gratitude towards Central University Haryana for giving me opportunity to enhance my knowledge and help me move forward in aspects related to career. Its beautiful location helped me to appreciate beauty of nature more closely.

I also wish to extend my heartiest gratitude towards Dr. Vinod Kumar Singh, Assistant Librarian and In-Charge of Central Library, Central University of Haryana for being cordial with us students and helping us liberally with the reference material needed by us, the students.

(Neha Rana)

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INTRODUCTION

Habib Tanvir was born in Raipur. He candidly wrote about his date of birth in his memoir, “If you go by the school certificate, I was born on 13 July 1925. If you take my mother’s diary as an authority, which I accidentally discovered after her death and which contained the dates of birth of all her children, then my date of birth is 1 September 1923” (Tanvir 44). His mother was a native of Raipur while his father, Mohammed Hayat Khan, was a migrant from Peshawar.

Among Tanvir’s eleven siblings, seven survived of which three were brothers and four were sisters. It is interesting to note that the age gap between him and his eldest sister was so wide that she had breastfed him when he was an infant. The second sister’s name was Akhtar Jahan Begum and Bilqis was his third elder sister. Among the brothers Hameed was the eldest who died at the age of twelve. Tanvir explained the cause of his death, “Hameed Bhaiyya suffered a few burns on his limbs and the doctor applied a dressing. But, after some days, he developed a tumour of the brain and died” (8). The other two brothers were Mazhar and Zaheer. Tanvir was the second youngest child and his sister Qaisar was the youngest, five years junior to him. His father initially handled grandfather’s business of ivory merchandise but later worked as an overseer with Public Works Department in Delhi, “He would draw up architectural maps for houses and supervise their construction” (7). It is a possibility that Tanvir might have learned something about stage architectural planning by observing his father make such maps. He was introduced to tribal culture of Peshavar by his father. He had great desire to visit Peshavar and become familiar with its tribal culture but couldn’t do so because of some political restrictions which prohibited foreigner’s entry into Peshavar.

He was named Habib Ahmed Khan by his parents but when he seriously started writing poetry he adopted Tanvir as his surname as well as his pen name. He described his foray into poetry, “This was after 1945 when I started composing poetry seriously, my ghazals started finding a place in Sardar Jafri’s journal Naya Adab, and I became a regular invitee to the mushairas at Amravat, which were organized by Siddiqi Saheb [Abdur Rahman Siddiqi]” (Tanvir 182).

For his formal schooling he went to Laurie Municipal High School, Raipur. There he actively participated in plays which were organized by the school, in Urdu or English language. In school he won many prizes for acting in plays. When he scored distinction in his school his teachers and family members advised him to take up science but contrary to their wishes and in alignment with his own desires he took up arts as subject of his choice for higher education. For his college studies he went to Morris College, Nagpur. After that he completed his masters in Urdu from Aligarh Muslim University in 1944.

He married Moneeka, who replaced him as a director in ‘Hindustani Theatre’ when he went to Europe for his theatre training under RADA scholarship. Her parents were from Bengal but she was born and brought up in Shimla. With her, he had a daughter whom he named Nageen and she was born on 28 November 1964. He also had another daughter, Anna Tanvir from Jill MacDonald, an English lady who worked at Exeter University as an educational researcher. She was born, raised and lived in Devonshire, UK. Tanvir met and grew close to her during his tour to Europe.

He grew up in close knit community and family. He used to visit the home of his relatives and friends during holidays. This certainly helped him to develop cultural sensibility and keenness. He heard of Chhattisgarhi folk song *dadariya* for the first time when he visited Lukhrapa village in Bilaspur district of Chhattisgarh. Here his eldest sister

used to live with her husband. People were not allowed to sing *dadariya* within the parameter of village boundary. Because of that, it was sung outside of the village, for example, near the river manihari. Tanvir explained:

Dadariya is a self-composed song which proceeds in the form of question and answers, and the singers come up with lines extempore. They are thus singers as well as poets. Good dadariya has a compelling force, and girls are known to elope with their lovers under its spell, therefore it is forbidden to sing it inside the village. [Tanvir 24]

Samarendra Saraf in his essay *Folk Culture of Chhattisgarh through an Ethnographer's Kaleidoscope* highlights cultural diversity of Chhattisgarh. It is “having fairly rich cross-sections of linguistic/ dialectic diversity ranging from Hindi, Urdu, Marathi and Malawi to Bundelkhandi and Chhattisgarhi, besides a multiplicity of tribal dialects” (115). He further explains that this cultural diversity is saved in folk forms practiced in this region:

Chhattisgarh also present unique cultural heritage----- still preserved by populace in its oral condition, still rehearsed in their folklore, the genre whereof being their myths, legends and folk tales, their folk songs and folk dances, their epic poems, their festivals and games, their jokes, proverbs and riddles, and so on. (Saraf 117)

In his childhood he was influenced by local poets of his hometown. In his own home he had inspiration available in the form of his elder brother Zaheer Ahmed Khan who composed poetry, *naats*, *hujooos* and *naats* in his leisure time and even acted in plays often taking up the roles of women. Zaheer was popular in his hometown for the same reasons. His mother and sisters brought him closer to the field of singing. They were good

singers and for this reason ‘Women’s Milad’ would often held at his home. Sometimes he used to join them in singing, “I would attend it with the women; sometimes Amma by herself, at other times three of us siblings [Bilqis, Akhtar and himself], would sing from Akbar Allahabadi’s *Miladnama*, from a *naat* by Bhaijaan [Zaheer] or other assorted songs” (Tanvir 20). These cultural activities helped Tanvir to hone his art of singing and poetry composition from the early stage of his life.

Cultural tradition in Raipur which played an important contribution in development of theatre sensibilities in Tanvir was annual staging of Kali Bari Theatre,

There was a tradition in Raipur that a new play would be presented at its Kali Bari during Durga Puja every year. The stage was quite large and usually well equipped with all kinds of props. That is why I have always had a soft spot for Kali Bari, which I regard as being an important cultural, rather than a religious, institution. (27)

The first play which he saw was *Mohabbat ke Phool* written by Hafiz Abdullah and performed by Kali Bari though it was mostly performed by Parsi theatre companies. At that time Parsi Theatre Companies were dominating the theatrical scene in India. Besides theatre halls they also owned travelling companies which travelled to different parts of India throughout the year and staged various plays. He described his first theatrical experience in great detail in his memoir:

The band took position in the pit of the stage and began to play a kind of overture. Then the curtain began to rise. First we saw coloured and bejeweled feet, then bright, multicoloured costumes and, finally, heavily made-up beautiful faces. The curtain was rising to the beat of the band and behind it we saw a row of actors singing the traditional opening tune of the

Dhrupad Vandana. These days the curtains usually part sideways to reveal the stage; I have always preferred it the older way, when curtains rose up from the ground and disappeared. (27)

Another technique used in this play which enchanted him was related to sound effects and stage set up which made the experience of watching this play even more exciting for him:

There was another trick that totally captivated me. In the wings there was a man holding a long iron rod and he would strike it hard at an iron receptor containing gunpowder, there would be a big blast and voila! The whole scene on the stage would change. The sets were made of painted curtains: a garden was depicted by rows of scenery flats kept aslant, which acted as wings and had paintings of flowers, trees, etc.; a palace was depicted by a painted curtain at the back and so on. (30)

Apart from music and dance he believed that drama and painting also share a close bonding, “During rehearsal I often use the example of painting to illustrate things for the actors: how to understand concepts like grouping, balance, focal point, etc” (29).

Mushairas also held a charm for him. He got fascinated with *mushairas* in his teenage year, “I had been introduced to the New Poetry wave in Urdu in Raipur itself. During our teens we’d go and listen to *mushairas* on the radio in Company Bagh” (116). His interest in poetry expanded with his advancing age. He along with his classmate and friend Madani would compose poem and debate over what constituted good poetry. He would go to weekly meetings held by Abdus Salim, a munshi in the commissioner’s office to narrate and discuss poems which were self-composed or that written by famous poets.

Also “Sometimes, I would organize a mushaira in my own house. Mushairas were frequently held at Madani’s House too” (ibid 119). Madani’s father would recite naats or marsiyas. So there were different forms of poetry which were composed, recited and listened to. They were *gazals*, *nazms*, *urooz*, *mushairas*, English poetry etc. During this time he also read poems by ‘progressive poets’ such as Mazaz, Jazbi, Jan Nisar Akhtar, Faiz, Makhdoom, Jafri etc. He met Jafri in Chhattisgarhi College in Raipur and even received his guidance regarding composition of poetry.

Cinema which began with silent movies had deep impact on him. In his memoir he talked about movies like *Toofan Mail*, *Rin Tin Tin*, *Huntermali Nadia*, *Nurani Moti*, *Amrit Manthan*, *Sita* etc. New Theatre in Calcutta and Prabhat Theatre in Pune were two major companies which were producing films at that time. When he was young he was most influenced by New Theatre films. “I would tell my friends that New Theatres’ class was evident in the fact that every new film had a different hero and a different director but the films were always of high quality” (131). Films produced by New Theatre Company are *Crorepati*, *Chandidas*, *Street Singer*, *Manzil*, *Devdas*, *Dhoop Chhaon* and *Chandidas*. He favored New Theatres’ films over Prabhat Theatre’s films because “The films produced by Prabhat tended to be slightly didactic and propagandist, the New Theatres films relied on subtler tones to convey their message” (131) and “The other difference lay in the fact that the Prabhat films were usually shot indoors, which allowed us to glimpse the marvelous set-making talent of Fatehlal and Damle whereas New Theatre films were mostly shot outdoors, showing us the river fields of Benga” (131).

It is interesting to note that he named his own theatre company which is Naya Theatre after New Theatre. Name of his theatre company is literal translation of Naya Theatre into hindi language.

Songs in the movies were not just attractions but piece of art in themselves. He also recalled songs like *Baalam aaye baso mere man mein* and *Sukh ek din the ek sapan tha, dukh ke din beetat nahi* from the movie *Devdas* as his favorite in his memoir. Songs in early movies were a hybrid of classical and folk, “The songs drew on our classical tradition on the one hand and folk forms on the other” (143). For example, Sardar Akhtar song *Andheriya hai raat, sajan rahiyo ki jahiyo*. Songs composed by S.D. Burman were based on Bengali folk tunes. This might have inspired him to experiment with folk and classical forms in his play like *Mrrichakatika*.

Tanvir was against stereotyping actors because “A good actor will suit comedy or tragedy, a hero’s or a villain’s role equally well or not at all” (137). He praised acting of Noor Mohammed Charlie because he acted in different kind of movies and took up different roles. *Char Chakram* is one of the most famous film which Tanvir could summon up in which Charlie played a comic role. He criticized cinema for stereotyping actors, “Our film industry is often obstinate in the way it uses its actors. It destroys their independence and stereotypes them in accordance with the success of their films and the money this generates” (135). Despite cinema having this drawback he acknowledges the contribution cinema had made in his life, “My first lesson in acting came from cinema. While at Morris College I used to see Hollywood Films at a cinema hall in Nagpur devoted exclusively to English films” (138). He adds “I kept up with the passion even after moving to Bombay. We would watch a film and discuss the performances, the shooting, the technicalities for hours on end- we would be under a spell for a long time” (138).

Before becoming singly devoted to theatre he entered into many vocational professions. When he first came to Bombay he acted in a movie titled *Aap ke Liye* in main leading role but this movie never got released because of dispute between producer and

director. He also worked as supervisor at the ammunition box factory. Then he worked for All- India Radio Bombay. After working in radio he worked for Baburao Patel's monthly magazine Film India. He also wrote articles and movie reviews for newspapers like *Bombay Chronicle*, *Soviet Cinema* and *Illustrated Weekly*. He even learned dancing from Shanti Bardhan who had formed Little Ballet Troupe. His wife Moneeka worked a secretary of this group for several months.

One dance program which had a lasting impact on him was of that of Vallathol, famous Kathakali dancer, which he saw in Bombay:

I was left quite amazed by a dance programme. On an open stage in a huge ground two dancers appeared holding a six-foot square curtain in their hands which they carried to the centre of the platform and stood still holding it straight. Somebody, positioned behind the curtain, was shaking it. He first showed us his golden-painted nails by displaying them above the curtain, then he stirred the curtains with his hands for a while, then he lifted the curtain slightly to reveal his feet and quickly covered them again. (28)

Eventually the curtain was dropped and the figure behind the curtain was revealed to be of Hanuman played by Vallathol. Tanvir interpreted the meaning behind this unusual dance practice to be:

The artiste must have assumed that if we saw Hanuman in all his splendor all at once we would not be able to bear the sight. So, he showed us different parts of him before revealing himself completely so that we became more accustomed and more prepared to witness his full glory. (28)

He called him his “first guru in theatre” (30). By observing this performance he learnt that a constant shift in focal points in a performance can bring forth and illuminate aspects of performance which an artist wants to emphasize upon.

It was in Bombay that he developed leanings towards left and became member and participant of Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) and Progressive Writers Association (PWA). He also witnessed great political events like Quit India movement (1942), Sailors Mutiny (1946), Second World War (1939-45) and India’s partition (1947).

Progressive Writers Association established in 1936 is one of the most significant movements in history of Indian literature. The aim of PWA was to work for ‘progress’ and freedom of common people from not only colonial and imperial rule but also from social evils like caste, class and gender discrimination. Here the term progress refers to evolution of ‘human civilization’ and society. Some of the notable literary figures who supported and were associated with this movement are Ismat Chughtai, Saadat Hasan Manto, Krishan Chander, Ali Sardar Jafri, Maqdoom Moinuddeen, Razia Sajjad Zaheer, Niaz Hyder and Kaifi Azmi. Writers who were its active members are Rajinder Singh Bedi, Upendra Nath Ashk, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Abdul Sattar, Ahmad Nadim Qasmi and Suhail Azimbadi. Among the poets were Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Josh Malihabadi, Firaq and Sahir Ludhianvi. Their works were amalgamation of aesthetic values and social concerns.

Tanvir’s love for writing poetry brought him closer to PWA, “What is the purpose of art- this was the argument raging in full steam everywhere. Along with acting I had also begun to compose poetry. And that had brought me close to the Progressive Writer’s Association” (257).

In order to curb the activities of PWA and hinder its expansion Government of India, Home Department leveled charges against it of it being a Socialist Party, kept close

watch over its activities and imposed heavy censorship on the works produced under its banner. This hindered its expansion and later working.

Sajjad Zaheer, Rashid Jahan, Mahmuduzzafar and Ahmad Ali are considered to be founding members of this movement. Together they published a collection of Short Stories titled as *Angare* which received lot of criticism and caused great uproar. *Maulvis* issued Fatwas against the book and authors. Punishments like ‘stoning to death’ and ‘hanging by the neck’ were sought for the authors. Rashid Jahan faced the severest of criticism. Threats of cutting up of her nose and rape loomed around her. Consequently the book was banned by the Government of the United Province under section 295 A of the Indian Penal Code on 15 March 1933. Faced with heavy censorship, political oppression and advent of second world PWA was dispersed in 1939.

IPTA began in Bangalore in April 1941 with four musical performances by Ram Gopal. The first conference of Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) was held on 25 May 1943 in Bombay. The main objective of the conference, “was the passing of the resolution, the forming of an All India Committee and the forming of Provincial Organizing Committees” (Pradhan 152). Resolution of IPTA was recommended by Snehanshu Acharya and was passed unanimously. The resolution passed was, “That this conference resolves that for the purpose of spreading the movement all over the country a representative of All India Committee be appointed and Provincial Organizing Committees be appointed” (152).

IPTA was working closely with people’s culture and used folk form to find ‘authentic’ representation of the common people. From IPTA group Raza Ali, a renowned mathematician and Yash Pal a successful scientist impressed Tanvir the most. In his IPTA days he acted in a play *Naql-e-Makani* by Rajender Singh Bedi, directed by Balraj Sahni

with Zohra Sehgal in role of heroine. He did another play *Dakkan ki Ek Raat* [One Night in Telangana] with Balraj Sahani. About his IPTA days he said

It was a time of great ferment and excitement. Propagandist and reformist songs were being composed on folk tunes; different kinds of political plays were being staged. We would stage productions in halls, in parks and grounds, on the road, in the narrow verandahs of worker's chawls; it was a time of great activity. (Tanvir 253)

Tanvir credited IPTA for the growth of his interest in folk tradition, "The IPTA provided my first schooling in theatre, especially in the folk forms of performing arts" (Katyal 23). He was appreciative of IPTA for it worked with theatre in close relationship with peasants and working class people.

He was in favor of interpreting tradition with imagination and creativity. His plays involved cultural epithets and language of common man. Some of the characteristics of his plays are explained by Katyal "a fluid structure with interwoven narratives, humorous sequences, live songs and music, a local flavor in the setting and the language" (26). In 1948 when main leaders of the IPTA were arrested during a procession he took up the charge of IPTA and helped to reorganize it.

IPTA successfully operated from 1942 to 1948 but later because of internal conflict among its members and external suppression by the government, it slowly dwindled. Under Dramatic Act of 1876 police was given the right "to raid places of performance, arrest actors, remove stage property, and confiscate manuscripts of the play". IPTA playwrights were asked to submit manuscript of their plays to the police before getting their plays staged. Government imposed entertainment tax on plays performed by IPTA

and IPTA being a non-profit organization was unable to keep up with expenses of production of play and payment of salary of members and taxes.

After his IPTA days Tanvir consciously started collecting folk songs. One of the most important characteristics of folk theatre is its close relationship with people. This form of cultural expression was ‘sophisticated’ as other forms of cultural expression according to him. When he organized workshops in rural areas he realized that:

When I began going to the villages to have workshops and began mingling with them, only then I realized at long last that there is a lot to learn from them, not only to give to them, which is the usual attitude of the elite or middle class officials in rural amelioration projects. There is in fact more to take from them than to give. (109)

One of the most important aspects of folk theatre is its close relationship with people. Tanvir while dealing with folk theatre adopted different approaches. According to Katyal one was of using ‘minimal intervention’ which he used in his play *Arjun ka Sarthi*. The second one was ‘creative intervention’ in matter of costume, content, music etc. whose application can be found in plays like *Thakur Pritipal Singh* and *Sone Sagar*. The third was incorporation of, “knowledge of costumes, lightning and theatrical techniques with traditional artistes” (110). Lastly, the fourth one was combination of folk tales with his ‘directorial vision’ to form plays like *Hirma Ki Amar Kahani*, *Bahadur Kalarin* and *Ponga Pandit*.

From Bombay after his stint with IPTA, he went to Delhi. In Delhi, he started leading his own path in theatre. The first play written by him was *Agra Bazaar*, performed for the first time in Delhi in 1954. Katyal remarked on the play *Agra Bazar* in her book *Habib Tanvir: Towards Inclusive Theatre* “I consider this to be one of Habib’s most

important productions. It reflects his fundamental concern with the beauty and value of the culture and language of the common man.” (26) This play was written to mark the anniversary of celebrated eighteenth century poet Nazir Akbarabadi on the request of Athar Parvez and other members of PWA. Teachers and students of Jamia Millia Islamia along with villagers of Okhla acted in this play. The success of Agra Bazar inspired him to form his own traditional theatre company, Naya Theatre.

He became a member of RADA [Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts] in 1955. He got scholarship from RADA and went to Britain to receive professional training in theatre. After a year of training he took lessons of art production at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. According to Tanvir “Telling the story is all the game in production. If it falters, it means the production is faulty, you’ve failed to tell the story. If anything is coming in the way- costume, light, décor, anything- you’ve failed to tell the story” (Katyal 37).

He had great desire to meet Bertolt Brecht, German playwright, poet and director. When he reached Berlin to his utter dismay he found that Brecht had died weeks ago. At that time Brecht’s plays were being performed everywhere, therefore Tanvir got to watch all his plays. He even saw the rehearsals of Brecht’s theatre company. His experience in Europe helped him to gain clarity as to what he wanted from theatre:

My absence from the country for about three years in mid- 1950s, when I was studying theatre in England and observing the theatres of Europe, made me acutely conscious of the fact that India needs to fall upon its traditions in theatre in order to evolve a new type of theatre which will be both authentic and contemporary. That to my mind is the crux of all cultural renaissance.
(37)

Among his international tryst it will be noteworthy to notice his visit to Kabul. He went to Kabul as a member of parliament with the task of writing a report on Afghani culture. For the same purpose he went to see Kabuli Theatre. Government officials there suggested to him to not watch it because according to them it was vulgar. When he saw it he was reminded of Parsi theatre of his childhood because of the similarity of infrastructural and sitting arrangement. Cheapest ticket buyers were made to sit on floor and quality of seat improved in accordance with the cost of ticket bought. Expressing respect and admiration for Kabuli Theatre in his memoir he wrote “I made a resolution that if Kabul lacked a middle- class and respectable theatre, and all it had were these performances, I must come back and work with these prostitutes and illiterate actors. Who knows, we might be able to come up with something radically new and meaningful” (Tanvir 286). From this we get to understand that his expectation from his engagement with theatre was to create something new. Chhattisgarh folk artists who are highly skilled in their art form face same discrimination in India as Kabuli theatre face in Kabul.

Tanvir expressed his dissatisfaction with the mainstream for neglecting folk artists out of its prejudices against ‘adivasi’ and ‘illiterates’. About folk form Katyal wrote “They were subaltern forms, brimming with irreverent digs at the status quo and subversive wit and humour. However, as the rural economy weakened and collapsed, folk actors and groups found their survival threatened” (Katyal xviii).

On his return to India he worked on *Mitti ki Gaadi* for Hindustani Theatre. This play was based on Shudraka’s play *Mrachchhakatikam*. It is a classical play but Tanvir directed this play in folk form. There were protests as to how a classical theatre was performed in folk form, an ‘inferior’ art form. Following these protests Tanvir was asked

to leave as he was not willing to budge from his decision which was that he will direct the play *Mitti ki Gaadi* only in folk form.

In 1964 he was removed from RADA on the basis of accusations made against him which accused him being a communist for his participation in IPTA. At that time people subscribing to communist ideology had to face fury of right wing government and they were disfavored when it came to government job or other provisions made by the government.

Regarding his involvement with folk artists and folk form he wrote “I have conducted several workshops in the Chhattisgarhi nacha form, have worked with Rajasthani actors in the khyal form and with the svang actors of Haryana” (Tanvir 296). One workshop was held in Rajasthan organized by Komal Kothari on the *Khayal* form. Another was held by him in Raipur on the folk form Nacha for twelve days in 1973. In this workshop local artists were taught new techniques of theatrical performance by the actors of Naya theatre such as techniques of using small products of day to day usage for stage technicalities were taught. Tanvir taught about a hack:

I would take a dalda tin and put a bulb in it, to show them the difference between a flood and a spot, and I told them, if you have nothing else, you can use this, and that by itself is a kind of spot since it controls focus, which is all a spot does, and the reflection of the white tin inside will increase the light. You can increase it more by adding reflectors, or put a lens on it.
(Katyul 57)

Besides *Nacha* folk form of Chhattisgarh, *Khayal* of Rajasthan, *Swang* of Haryana he also held workshop for Orissa folk form *Prahalad Nataka* and *Bharata Lila* in Ganjam district of Orissa in April 1976 sponsored by Ministry of Education and Social Welfare,

Government of India. *Prahalad Natak* closely follows ‘classical ragas’ in terms of music, dance, costumes, make up etc. The atmosphere of scene is developed with the help of beating of drums or dholaks.

According to Tanvir in Naya Theatre brochure for *Prahalad, Nataka Bharata Lila* on the other hand is “a less rigid and totally different form of theatre. Though essentially a musically form, it leans more on verbal expression” (Katyal 121). The content matter is from Mahabharata where Arjun is married to Subhadra. “The tone is light, witty and satirical, with everything contributing to this overall effect- not just the improvised dialogue but also the songs, dances and gestures. There is a chief jester figure, the Dwari [in fact, an alternate name for this form is Dwari Nata]” (Katyal 121). In the play heroism of Arjun and other Pandavas is mocked by Dwari by recalling some of their unheroic moments like humiliations they had to face while hiding in Virathnagar. This play reveals the subversive nature of folk art form.

He himself learnt a lot from folk theatre and folk artists. He understood use of dance in Sufi religious celebration like *wajid* when he saw the tribal dance performed by folk artistes of Chhatisgarh. “The singers at fair can invite the Devi, the listeners may be possessed by *devtas* but it has everything to do with the beat. Jazz musicians, voodoo magicians, tribal dancers from Dang in Gujrat, folk singers in Africa and the Americas can all come under the same spell- of music” (Tanvir 97). Besides folk artists he also included rural people and ‘housewives’ who could sing and had “experience of singing and dancing in the temples, fields and homes as part of the process of worship and daily work” (97) in his Naya Theatre.

He started Naya Theatre with his wife Moneeka in New Delhi and got it registered in 1964. About his theatre he said “And howsoever other people would like to characterize

it, my theatre was, and still is, modern and contemporary” (Malik and Malik 142). Two chief attributes of oral tradition which are Improvisation and non-linear treatment of time and space are used by Tanvir.

Frequent clashes and conflicts emerged between Tanvir and his Chhattisgarhi troupe members because “Habituated to the easy-going Nacha, where there was no director and actors themselves improvised at will and pretty much did as they pleased, this tough, demanding discipline took some getting used to” (Katyal 80). But the relationship between them was such that if Tanvir hurled any abuse at them they would answer him back with even more abuses. If any artist left his group he would trace them, go after them and bring them back. Later he developed an open door policy. Once when Fida Bai, the lead actress of Naya Theatre was locked by her mother-in-law so as to prevent her from acting, he went to the extent of going to police and getting her freed. Later Fida Bai got divorce and lived as an independent woman. When Fida Bai immolated her-self in a fit of rage, he took care of all the cost of her treatment and took her to ‘good’ hospitals for treatment and care. Also he shifted headquarters of his theatre to Bhilai where her treatment was going on.

His daughter Nageen recalled how he would extract best acting from his actors by completely involving them in rehearsals:

Baba used to first explain to the actors the theme of that particular scene. What happens in the scene, what does the scene say? A scene is made up of units, the units have sub-units and these are further subdivided....Each of these has a focal point. After explaining the scene to the actors he would ask them to improvise the dialogues and the movements and hand gestures

freely. Then he would ask them, what does the scene say, to test whether the actors had quite understood. (Katyal 56)

This way he will derive active participation from his actors. The unique feature of Naya Theatre is “Naya Theatre productions would typically feature Chhattisgarhi actors performing in their mother tongue, live music and songs, dances and rituals, and minimal stage and lighting design and props” (75). Since Chhattisgarhi folk artists came from tribes and scheduled caste they were not treated equally either in urban or rural settings. Exposure on International platform helped folk artists of Naya Theatre to get glimpse of a new worldview where they witnessed their own worthiness.

In 1962 Tanvir was selected as representative of India by Ford Foundation’s educational program. Under this program he visited various cities in United States for the duration of two years. In the year 1969 he was awarded by Sangeet Natak Akademi. In 1972 he became member of Rajya Sabha.

He produced adaptations of many classical, Indian literature and foreign plays too. The Sanskrit play includes Sudraka’s *Mrichhakatikam* as *Mitti ki Gaadi* and Bhasa’s *Urubhangam* as *Duryodhan*. Other plays include *Rustom-o-Sohrab* by Aga Hashr Kashmiri, *Bagh* from Sisir Das, *Jis Lahore Nahi Vekhya Voh Janmya Hi Nahi* by Asghar Wajahat, *Shatranj Ke Mohre* and *Moteram Ka Satyagraha* from Premchand and *Rajdarshan* by Manoj Mitra’s as *Nand Raja Mast Hain*. “Later in his career, Habib turned to Rabindranath Tagore. He presented *Visarjan* first as a collaborative production with Rangakarmee, Usha Ganguli’s Kolkata-based company and, later, reworked it as *Raj-Rakt*, drawn from Tagore’s drama *Visarjan* and his novel *Rajarshi* ” (89).

From International sources, Soviet play *The Feminist Touch* was adapted by him into *Jaalindar Parde* and *Khudkhushi* from a story by Dostoevsky. *Shah Badshah* was

inspired from *The Government Inspector* by Gogol, *Dushman* from Gorky's *Enemies*; and *Zehreeli Hawa* from Canadian playwright Rahul Verma's *Bhopal*. "He also did a story by Stefan Zweig, 'The Eyes of My Undying Brother', as *Dekh Rahe Hain Nain*; and Moliere's *The Bourgeois Gentlemen*, first as *Mirza Shohrat Beg* and later as *Lala Shohrat Rai*" (89).

He also adapted William Shakespeare's play *The Taming of Shrew* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as *Kamdev Ka Apna Basant Ritu Ka Sapna*. Bertolt Brecht is another playwright whose play *Good Woman of Schezuan* he adapted as *Sajapur Ki Shanti Bai*.

Some of his plays concerned with social issues are *Ponga Pandit*, *Kushtia ka Chaprasi*, *Zehreeli Hawa* etc.

Inspiration for his play *Mere Baad* came from what had happened to the poet Yagana, "One day, as a result of a shenanigan by the famous scholar Niyaz Fatehpuri, some people got hold of him, painted his face black with coal tar, put him facing backwards on a donkey and paraded him to the beats of a *dholl* all over the city." [207] In a while after this incident Yagana passed away. Affected by this incidence Tanvir wrote the play *Mere Baad* though it was based on Ghalib's life.

After 1970 he tried to make plays in the language of his Chhattisgarhi actors and organized workshops in the region of Raipur and other rural areas. This led to formation of the play *Gaon ka Naam Saural, Mor Naam Damaad*. It is an important play because despite being performed in local language of Chhattisgarh it proved to be successful in Delhi. It ran twelve shows houseful in Delhi and thus was successful in crossing language barriers:

This paved the way for *Charandas Chor* in 1974 and for all the other plays that followed. Tanvir explains, “It was a turning point in my career, a breakthrough in introducing Chhattisgarhi as a language for a modern play. It gave me an all- Chhattisgarhi cast. Upto now I was combining them with urban actors. Now only folk actors” (Tanvir 337).

Charandas Chor is one of the most famous play written and directed by him. The story for *Charandas Chor* is taken from Rajasthan written by Vijaydan Detha. For this play his team received Fringe Fast award at the International Drama Festival in Edinburgh.

Almost all the associations which Tanvir formed with people were based on his love of cultural art. During his stay in Nice when “a young Algerian lad approached and kept pestering him for a souvenir- his last 10 pound note, his fountain pen- till Habib asked him if he could sing” (Katyal xv). Habib sang a Chhattisgarhi song to him and learnt an Algerian song from him. At moment of dispersal he told him “Now you’ve got a souvenir from me and I’ve got one from you and we’re none the poorer for it, in fact we’re richer. Goodbye” (Katyal xv). This incidence indicated that cultural art was indeed important to him more than anything. Katyal adds “Songs, and the oral tradition of which our folk performance forms are an integral part, remained central to Habib’s theatrical journey right to the very end of his life” (xvi). After his death Sudhanve Deshpande, theatre activist called him a ‘renaissance man’ for the reason that:

There was nothing he could not do in theatre-he wrote, translated, adapted and evolved plays; he was a mater director, a superb actor and a good singer; he wrote poetry and songs; he could compose music; he was a designer; he was manager of his company Naya Theatre, which he ran first with his wife Moneeka (and single-handed after her death) for exactly fifty

years; he was a critic and theoretician; more, he was a seer, a guru for generations of younger theatre artists. (xvi)

Tanvir brought folk and modern seemingly two different worlds together. Katyal asserts “He has shown that the folk actor can confidently perform in and make contribution to modern theatre, in terms of both form and content” (xxi).

After three weeks of illness he died in Bhopal on 8 June 2009. Sudhanva Deshpande and Sanjay Maharishi have made a documentary on him. He is recipient of awards like Padamshree and Padmabhushan, Fringe Firsts Award at the Edinburgh Drama Festival and Sangeet Natak Akademi.

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Modern, Folk and Theatre of Roots

Before understanding modern Indian theatre one needs to understand the meaning of modern, specifically in the context of India. Ananda Lal problematizes the idea of 'modern' in his essay *A Hisoriography of Modern Indian Theatre*. He indicates that people commonly "use 'modern' very loosely to refer to post-Independence developments, often unaware that those very aspects that they associate with modernity had all appeared previously at different times during the course of the colonial period in India" (Lal 31). This understanding postulates that the proper name for theatre in post- independent India should be "post-modern, postcolonial or even contemporary" (Lal 31).

He traces back emergence of the modern Indian theatre to the colonial times, "modern theatre's beginnings can be identified in the colonial encounter that resulted in the influence of Western and European models on local theatrical traditions" (xv).

According to Dr. Nandini Sahu emergence of Modern Indian Literature is connected with development of printing press and division of language into 'major' and 'minor' languages. The printing press brought change in the way stories were being told, "The primary critical role that print culture played in two spheres of literature are the mass production of books and the changes in the narrative structure used in literary texts" (xxiv). Mass production of books helped in popularizing one way of telling a story. The chief demarcation within Indian languages happened during nationalist struggle. The major languages "came to represent the cultures of the middle classes (the dominant educated group and the elite which emerged across the subcontinent)" (xxv) 'Minor' languages on the other hand "were basically the languages of the common man which were the folk languages" (xxv) Much of what is known as Modern Indian Literature is written in 'Major'

languages. At its inception modern Indian theatre heavily drew its inspiration from western theatre as explained by Dharwadker:

As it was first institutionalized in the colonial metropolis, modern Indian theatre appeared to epitomize the conditions of colonial dominance: it borrowed its organizational structures, textual features, and performance conventions from Europe (especially England), superseded traditional and popular indigenous performance genres, and found its core audience among the growing English-educated Indian middle class. (62)

Folk as a definite category in India emerged in the late nineteenth century according to Herder. Dalmia believed that growth of interest in folk coincided with emergence of modern literature, “Perhaps not surprisingly this interest in folk culture, as well as the category ‘folk’ came into currency at the same time as the ‘high’ literature in the modern print languages began to take shape and set up a canon for itself” (155). This was so because modern literature needed a binary to establish its hegemony over and folk was presented as the other binary.

Western influence involves setting up of many playhouses of which the most famous were Calcutta Theatre and Chowringhee Theatre built in 1755 and 1839 respectively. Sans Souci Theatre was opened in 1839. Initially entry to these playhouses was restricted to British audience only. Proscenium arch was first used in India in Bombay Theatre (1776) and Playhouse (Calcutta, 1753). He elaborates:

The notion of modernity played out into multiple spheres of theatrical life, including venues of performance, theatre architecture, patronage, space, lighting, proscenium stages, the commercialization of theatre through the

sale of tickets, and even the shift from the actor-manager role to that of director. (xvi)

Another difficulty besides confusion related to the meaning of 'modern' which poses a challenge in defining modern Indian theatre is its wide thematic expanse:

The thematic range of modern theatre includes the politics of the British Raj, conditions prevalent on tea and indigo plantations, workers' rights, famines, the 1947 Partition, psychosocial fragmentation, familial problems and urban angst, concerns with women's issues, dowry problems, and the rights of dalits, among other issues. (Bhatia xiii)

The problem of defining modern Indian theatre becomes even more troublesome because of its use of variety of forms like "mythological dramas, folk forms and rituals, historical revivals, transformed version of Euro-American plays, notably of Shakespeare and Brecht, and through avant-garde experimentation" (xiii). The thing which makes study of modern Indian theatre complex is "overlapping colonialist, nationalist, and Orientalist position." (Rudisill 935-936)

The first 'modern' Indian play to be written in English according to Anand Lal is *The Persecuted, or Of the Dramatic Scenes Illustrativ Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta* by Krishna Mohan Banerjee in 1831 though it was never staged. He deems this play to be modern because Banerjee criticized the social conditions of his times through this play. Thus he makes social criticism an element of modern Indian Theatre.

Another major landmark in development of modern Indian theatre lies in 1853, when Vishnudas Bhave presented the first ticketed shows at the Grand Road Theatre, Bombay for local audience. Modern element in this instance was "democratic sale of tickets as a commercial strategy" (Lal 33).

Modern Indian theatre experimented with songs. Some example of such experimentation are, “Kirloskar mixed secular folk songs with devotional kirtans, Hindustani with Carnatic ragas, and had them delivered by his actors rather than the usual practice of a chorus. Tagore boldly refashioned classical ragas and even inserted snatches of Western music in a fully operatic creation” (Lal 35).

Regarding modern Indian theatre, “The most significant paradigm shift took place in matters of gender related to performance” (Lal 35). The fact is women used to act as late as 1795 but they were considered to be women of ‘easy virtue’. Tagore changed this perception when women from his own family acted in his plays *Mayar Khela* and *Valmiki Pratibha*. Women entered Marathi theatre as late as 1933. “The acceptability of women on stage became a major step in the progress of modernism” (Lal 36).

Modernity signified repeated shifts of scene and painted background according to Bharatendu Harishchandra, father of modern Hindi theatre. Dalmia identified it to be “repeated change of scene, a narrative segmentation that is implemented by the recurrent shift of the painted background” (Dalmia 36).

Parsi theatres’ popularity lasted from 1880s till 1930s and contributed immensely to the development of modern Indian theatre. “In terms of themes, the Parsi theatres’ modernity derived from their international eclectic and hybrid repertoire of stories and forms that included the Persian Shah Nama, Arabian Nights, nineteenth century courtesan culture, stories from Shakespeare, and Victorian melodrama” (Lal xvii).

According to K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar two ‘World Wars’, ‘anti-colonial movement’ and ‘social reform’ had a bearing on themes of drama produced in the early years of twentieth century modern India. Literary movements like ‘Symbolism’, ‘Psychoanalysis’, ‘Marxism’ and ‘Surrealism’ were other influences. He also said that acting of actors also

underwent a shift in modern theatre. “The diverse illusion of the written word, spoken voice, vivid gesture, scenic display, and riot of colour and sound somehow create life in the theatre, and the imaginative actor’s part is almost as important as the creative dramatist’s” (Iyengar 9).

Some of the most famous playwrights of modern Indian theatre are Badal Sircar (Bengali), Vijay Tendulkar (Marathi), Girish Karnad (Kannada), Mohan Rakesh (Hindi) and Habib Tanvir (Hindi and Urdu).

After Independence need for new kind of theatre was felt which can be summed up in Aparna Dharwadker’s words “the middle ground between mere revivalism and imitative Westernization, which would reconcile pre-colonial traditions with the sociocultural formation of a modern nation-state” (43).

In post-independent India talks on tradition and ‘authentic Indian theatre’ posed problems for modern Indian theatre. Anuradha Kapur in her essay *Reassembling the Modern- An Indian Theatre Map since Independence* talks about ‘tradition’, “In a very general sense, we know of course, that tradition means handing down knowledge of various sorts, or of passing a doctrine, but somewhere there is another subtextual sense as well, that this handing down is done with respect and duty” (Kapur 41).

This indicates that tradition derives its authenticity in its rigidity and is not subjected to change. There is a paradox when identity is linked to authenticity. Kapur explains:

In some sense all these imagined authenticities are fables of identity where the ultimate referent is a spirit untainted by the fragmentation of modern life. If this is the case, then tradition is more a tradition of what we seek to

recover; not unchanging or age old, but it's very opposite, transformed and used. (43)

Theatre of roots tried to retrieve the cultural artifacts which were suppressed and forgotten during colonial era. It was popular from 1960s to 1980s. Theatre of roots is an umbrella term given by Suresh Awasthi in his essay *In Defense of the 'Theatre of Roots'* defining it to be “the new unconventional theatre, which has been evolving as a result of its encounter with tradition for some two decades” (295). Richard Schehner in his essay *In Memory: Suresh Awasthi* wrote that Awasthi coined the term ‘Theatre of Roots’ to refer to “describe the work of modern artists who actively incorporated traditional genres in their theatrical productions” (Schehner 11). According to Mee ‘theatre of roots’ is essential as it “challenged colonial culture by reclaiming the aesthetics of performance and by addressing the politics of aesthetics” (Mee 5).

Suresh Awasthi, General Secretary of the Sangeet Natak Akademi from 1965-75 advised that modern Indian theatre should return to its ‘roots’. Some of the modern playwrights who have followed this route are Mohan Agashe, B.V. Karanth, Kavalam Pannikar, Rattan Thiyam etc. Awasthi wanted to create a national theatre in which the modern and traditional elements merged together “where village and urban cultures existed both independently and in combination” (Schehner 10). In his essay *Of Theatre of Roots* Awasthi said “It is deeply rooted in regional theatrical culture, but cuts across linguistic barriers, and has a pan- Indian character in idiom and communicability” (295).

In post- Independent period “The return to and discovery of tradition was inspired by a search for roots and quest for identity. This was part of the whole process of decolonization of our lifestyle, values, social institutions, creative forms and cultural

modes” (295). Here, “Pre-modern forms, especially those that were uncontaminated by ‘western influences’, are affirmed and put to use in theatre practice” (44).

During 1950s and 60s major playwrights like Mohan Rakesh, Dharamvir Bharti and Vijay Tendulkar were writing plays which dealt with existential crisis. Girish Karnad was using myths and reshaping them to accommodate modern concerns. Bandopadhyay described the time period from mid-1960s to mid-1970s as a ‘Renaissance of Indian Theatre’ because of:

intense experimentation that saw, on the one hand, the collapse of the well-made play, yet, on the other hand, simultaneously engaged with Western forms, especially Brechtian, in combination with local forms and conversations and returned to the folk in ways which revealed overlaps with the proponents of the ‘roots’ movement. (Bhatia xxv)

Another trend in modern theatre is co-writing of play scripts. “For one thing, new dramatic structures that stress collective and cooperative working processes by giving precedence to performance rather than to the play script have come into circulation” (Kapur 50).

Awasthi proposed advancement of modern Indian theatre towards embodying indigenous traditions. One of the chief characteristic of Theatre of Roots is rejection of proscenium theatre and “use of a variety of performance spaces to bring about a closer relationship between the actor and spectator, and afford a new perception of the performance of the performance by spectators” (298).

The difference between proscenium and traditional theatre is that proscenium theatre imposed a fixed frontal view on the audience of performance. This was done so by fixing the space occupied by spectators. Audience looked at performance from a fixed

distance and angle. In traditional theatre practice the audience occupied a more flexible place. Some spectators would even sit on stage and often they would sit in a circle surrounding the performers. Awasthi describes the space of performance in traditional theatre, “In our classical tradition, a spectator was a Prekshaka, one who sees, and sat in a theatre-hall called Prekshagriha, one who sees, and sat in a theatre-hall called Prekshagriha, a ‘seeing place’ ” (303).

Incorporation of music in folk forms seems to accentuate the performance of the actor, “Music has also become more integral to the actors’ gaits, movements and physical acting. It accentuates actors’ entrances and exits, highlights their movement, and provides a frame for visual images” (308). To produce music in performance often drum is put to use. Awasthi credits Habib Tanvir for taking modern Indian theatre towards Indian ‘roots’ as Tanvir rejected realism in his plays. Through his plays such as *Agra Bazar* and *Mitti ki Gaadi*, “he brought back music and poetry to the theatre, and a sense of gaiety and celebration traditionally associated with a theatrical event” (Awasthi 297).

Suman Mukherjee and Induja Awasthi offer criticism on theatre of roots in their essay *Indianess*, “This particular movement is just an obscure expedition of medievalism containing in its objective an elite concern for ‘revivalism’ and ‘ritualism.’ They widely practice their rituals in the front of city elite and the foreign delegates in the name of ‘Indianess’” (Awasthi and Mukherjee 20).

In late 90’s there was a trend of reviving Sanskrit plays in such a manner that it appealed to modern audience. Kalidasa Festival which took place in 1974 provided incentive to playwrights all over India to reproduce Sanskrit plays. “Such trends and developments initiated a movement towards a return to the ‘theatre of roots’ that sought its

energy in local traditional, ritual and folk performances” (Bhatia xxii). This trend emerged in order to counter the ongoing ‘mindless’ imitation of western theatrical practices.

Sangeet Natak Akademi and National School of Drama were set up in order to safeguard the ‘folk’ traditions. Nehru Centenary Festival organized by Sangeet Natak Akademi was a two week program which began in New Delhi on September 1989. This function was a tribute to Jawaharlal Nehru whom Induja Awasthi called “the architect of modern India” (Awasthi 184) in her essay *Retrospective of “Modern Indian Theatre”*. She explained the intention behind organizing such program was that the “The festival was planned as a retrospective of modern Indian theatre covering the gamut of the last 40 years and offering the glimpses of its various development in various Indian languages” (Awasthi 184). Plays from eight languages were presented in order to represent modern Indian drama as a blended identity negotiated across different languages and regions of India. Famous playwrights like Utpal Dutt, Bijan Bhattacharya, Girish Karnad and K.M. Pannikar presented the plays. Plays from eight different languages were staged during the course of the function. It was ‘retrospective’ in the sense that the major plays of past plays such as Bijon Bhattacharya’s *Nabanna*, Karnad’s *Hayavadana*, Rakesh’s *Adhe Adhure*, Tendulkar’s *Ghahiram Kotval* etc. were staged and discussed all over again. This was first of its kind of gathering to happen related to modern Indian theatre where several different kind of theatre were staged at same place,

There was a great range and variety, both in the form and structure of plays and production styles. Some represented the realistic mode and some, taking inspiration from folk forms, used music, movement, and mime and belonged to the new movement of nonrealistic theatre. (Awasthi 184)

Habib Tanvir too participated and staged his play *Agra Bazar*. Awasthi describes the caliber of Tanvir's work, "His theatre work has a strong folk idiom and echoes the whole culture of a people" (Awasthi 185). The reason behind selection and staging of the play *Agra Bazar* was that:

Agra Bazar is woven round the poetry of Nazir Akbarabadi, who wrote for and about common people; his poems were sung by vendors and itinerant performers in festivals and fairs. First presented in 1954 at a time when the realistic theatre was at its peak, *Agra Bazar* gave a most refreshing experience and brought back poetry, music, and a sense of celebration to the theatre. (Awasthi 185)

From this event it became clear that "the 'theatre of roots' with its blending of song, music, dance, movement and with a contemporary thematic content, was a significant feature of post-Independence Indian theatre" (Awasthi 188).

During 1960s-1970s Ford Foundation entered into scenario of Indian Theatre and gave funds to the projects which were working with 'folk material'. Habib Tanvir was among the first batch of playwrights who received funds from Ford Foundation.

International Theatre Institute (ITI) organized *The First World Conference on Theatre* on 29 November 1956 in Bombay with delegates coming from more than twenty countries. In this conference, two committees were formed, one on Popular Theatre and the other on Theatre and Youth. The resolution passed by Theatre and Youth committee emphasized on bringing theatre and dramatic arts into academics. It also proposed formation of "Theatre Faculty of Asia" which would study different theatrical forms in Asia, carry out research in the field of classical theatre, will provide training in theatrical practices and will conduct workshop and seminars related to playwriting and theatre

productions. Committee on Popular Theatre shed light on the issues of need of financial aid for access to specialized technology and other stage crafts. In reference to this problem it was suggested that ITI would bring about exchange of knowledge and skills by facilitating an International Theatre movement.

Lothar Lutze in his essay *Enacting the Life of Rama: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Religious Folk Theatre of Northern India* praises Habib Tanvir and Ebrahim Alkazi for breaking away from conventional theatre practice:

Only with the emergence and the vision and energy of directors like Habib Tanvir and Ebrahim Alkazi, and the foundation, in 1959, of the National School of Drama (whose director Alkazi became in 1962), did a process of experimentation and professionalization start which has since changed the Indian theatrical scene altogether and is still going on. (312)

Controversy over Tanvir performing classical Sanskrit theatre, *Mrachchhakatikam* in nacha folk form shed light on the issue of division and segregation between art forms in India. Tanvir embarked on something new when he performed a classical play which is generally considered to be a 'finer and sophisticated' art form in folk form, supposedly to be less evolved art form.

Tanvir drew similarity between the folk and Sanskrit theatre in his interview in *Nukkad* taken by Rajinder Paul, "Now, in our country, the folk theatre and the classical theatre...are but two sides of the same coin...The Sanskrit drama...is but one terse crystallization of what has gone before it by way of folk traditions." (Katyul 90) Sudhanva Deshpande adds to this assertion in her words:

In other words, there was a line that connected the classical drama of ancient India with the rural theatre forms of modern India. The line was

circuitous, it was broken, and the links were not always clear, but there was a connection. And if there was such a connection, then clearly there could not be a radical chasm between ‘classical’ and ‘folk’, between high and low, between margi and desi. This was a phenomenal insight, but not one easy to arrive at. The invention of the ‘classical’ tradition in dance and in music had emphasised the very opposite- the dissociation between the desi and margi. Habib Tanvir was one of the first to see through this obfuscation. (Katyals 91)

According to J. A. Withey, folk theatre was used to propagate religion initially. Farley Richmond also gave similar view in his essay *The Political Role of Theatre in India*, “Between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries theatre was widely used by poet-saints to spread and sustain the bhakti movement of Hinduism among the common people throughout the length and breadth of India.” (Richmond 318)

Against the common misunderstanding in India which separates folk theatre from Sanskrit drama Tanvir wrote

The truth is, however, that these other aspects of acting and stage-craft in folk theatre also share a considerable common area with the Indian classical drama. In fact they are but two sides of the same coin, two facets of the same culture. To compartmentalize them is like depriving the people of one half of their rightful cultural heritage and dividing culture in terms of classes, superficially and quite arbitrarily. (Tanvir 37)

During Nationalistic struggle theatre was used to propagate the idea of independence from British colonial rule. The first drama of social protest which caught

attention of masses is *Nildarpana* (1860) by Dinabandhu Mitra, in which he talked about plight of peasants in Bengal who were forced to grow indigo instead of food crops.

In modern times folk theatre is being used by the government of India to “encourage mutual understanding among its disparate states by sponsoring an inter-state exchange of cultural troupes, the theory being that emotional integration might lubricate the gears of intellectual integration” (Whitney 132).

Adaptation of modern themes into folk theatre is one attribute of modern Indian theatre.

Indian Institute of Mass communication organized a two day seminar on 20 August 1968 focusing on usefulness of ‘traditional media’ in carrying out modern ideas. The seminar concluded that traditional forms indeed have potential to convey ‘modern’ ideas and recommendations were made to use them to propagate social and economic changes.

According to Erin B. Mee modern theatre in India began in cities with colonial ports like Calcutta, Madras and Bombay thus drawing link between modernity and colonial influences. About modern Indian theatre Erin B. Mee in her essay *Contemporary Indian Theatre* wrote that “The proscenium which was adopted for much of the modern theatre separated the participants from the observers; ticket sales put an emphasis on theatre as a commodity, making it available to a smaller, and wealthier, group of people” (1).

Regarding the use of traditional forms in modern Indian theatre Girish Karnad said that the intention “was not to find and reuse forms that had worked successfully in some other cultural context. The hope, rather, was to discover whether there was a structure of expectations- and conventions- about entertainment underlying these forms from which one could learn” (Mee 1).

Pannikar described the reason behind his interest for folk theatre, “Folk contains the archetypal elementary expression of man, which is related to the soil of the land” (Mee 2). Regarding the validity of folk art in contemporary times Pannikar said “The folk sensibility is not something which belongs to a bygone era, but is something very contemporary, which can be very useful for contemporary man while interpreted to the modern sensibility” (Mee 11).

Folk form is not based on rationality and logic but extensively makes use of imagination. *Thanathu* are scenes in folk theatre where rules of logic are inapplicable and are considered to be ‘highest point’ of imagination in theatre. Use of techniques of classical theatre, folk theatre and modern theatre by playwrights such as Tanvir and Pannikar inspired Mee to say that “Indian theatre is not conflict-oriented, but transformation-oriented” (Mee 2).

Habib Tanvir in his essay *Theatre is In the Villages* conveys his belief that India can find its true representation only in its countryside:

It must now be realized that the vehicle provided by urban theatre forms borrowed from the West is totally inadequate for effectively projecting the social aspirations, way of life, cultural patterns and fundamental problems of contemporary India. The true pattern of Indian culture in all its facets can be witnessed in the countryside. (Tanvir 33)

He further highlights the miserable condition of artists in rural areas, “The paradox is that our richest cultural tradition is couched in areas of utmost poverty-the villages. In other words, art and culture is richest precisely in those areas where the people are poorest. And these comprise the overwhelming population of India” (34).

He speaks against revivalism, “It is no use turning to the dead book of classical theatre in India and trying to revive the archaic theatre forms of yesterday without relating them to the living traditions of today” (35). The reason that folk theatre is still alive and not classical theatre because:

The difference actually lies in the improvised dialogue of the folk theatre and its stock situations and plots, which remain nonetheless flexible, incorporating the latest local events and the changing social temper of the people, and satirizing topical happenings as they go along. This quality of the folk theatre is what makes for its perfect rapport with its audience.

(Tanvir 37)

The folk artist does not believe in notions of pure art and is ready to incorporate various distinct techniques in their art form. Folk theatre also follows the art of minimalism and improvisation, “In all cases, however, simple and inexpensive indigenous materials are often used for make-up. As for lighting, the simple torches used in the past are now often substituted by ordinary electric bulbs, even tube lights rather clumsily used” (Tanvir 38). Folk theatre’s closeness to people makes it “invaluable source material on which to strive to build the edifice of contemporary Indian drama” (Tanvir 38).

Regarding use of folk form in context of gender Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker in her book *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory, and Urban Performance in India since 1947* wrote, “the qualities of antirealism and anti-modernity allow these plays [Girish Karnad’s *Hayavadana* (1971), Chandrashekar Kambar’s *Jokumaraswami* (1972), and Habib Tanvir’s *Charandas Chor* (1974)] to place women at the center, represent Indian villages as a realm of ambivalent freedom and fulfillment, and offer a serious if not decisive challenge to patriarchy” (Dharwadker 15).

Sadanand Menon discussed how Habib Tanvir created his own niche in his essay

Playmaking as a Primary Act of Politics:

He was to eventually evolve his work in two specific areas- one, to reclaim the space for new suggestive, allusive content more common to folk ballads and to a whole range of humorous and irreverent performances drawing upon the spirit of resistance embedded in native wit and irony. The other area was rejection of the proscenium space in favour of a more fluid and unregulated theatrical space which contributed immensely to the participative character of his productions. (Menon 34)

He defined Tanvir along with Vijay Tendulkar as the shaper of “most definable contours of modern Indian theatre” (Menon 35).

Tanvir never proposed solutions to the problems presented in his plays for the reasons:

He decided to abandon the didactic route in art as explored by early Leftist theatre and work through allusion, suggestion and inference, enabling audiences to enjoy as well as draw their own political conclusions, so that they did not feel their realisation was externally induced. It led to the creation of a theatre without schooling. (Menon 36)

Dharwadker explains the reason behind the focus on folk after Independence:

Most of the critical and creative engagement with indigenous forms in the post-independence period has come to center on folk performance genres popular in various rural regions throughout the country because the category of ‘folk’ brings into play the most complex range of ideological,

political, sociocultural, and aesthetic polarities in contemporary India.
(Dharwadker 311)

Tanvir's interaction with folk theatre is not just limited to the region of Chhattisgarh. He organized various workshops related to folk theatrical art forms. After *Khayal* workshop in Rajasthan, he held *Swang* workshop in Rai, Haryana. It was sponsored by the government of Haryana. Tanvir prepared for two months for the workshop wherein he explored the *Swang* form. He wrote in Naya Theatre brochure for *Sahi Lakarhara* and *Jani Chor* that:

It [*Swang*] has become so informal that it has ceased to care for costume, grouping, dramatic tension, development and climax. The story reveals itself in a string of songs into which all virtuosity is instilled to the utter neglect of the story. They often dwell exhaustively on the various nuances of a particular situation through the medium of songs without effecting dramatic progression ... the musical tension is often dropped by the bald little statements that usually inter-link the songs. And more often, there is stalemate before the next song is allowed fully to emerge. (Katyal 118)

The things which were still vibrant of *Swang* form were its extensive use of music. He found out that the tune of songs used *Swang* folk form was more similar to classical than folk forms. He intervened in *Swang* form by reducing its time span from its original three to four hours to two hours. Besides ragnis, other songs like community songs, songs by jogis and street singers were added along with improvised dialogues. Stage set up was also changed from small round area of capacity of holding not more than sixteen people to a raised platform of six by six. In this conference Tanvir produced the play *Jani Chor*.

After this conference in 1976, Tanvir conducted a conference in Orissa which went on for two weeks. It was sponsored by Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, Government of India. *Prahalad Nataka* and *Bharata Lila* were the folk forms which were focused upon in this conference.

Tanvir's experimentation and creativity becomes apparent in the play *Bahadur Kalarin*. He took up a difficult subject matter of incest in this play. It is based on Chhattisgarhi oral folk tale which talks of incest between a mother and her son. A woman is seduced by a king and a son is born to her. The son is Bahadur Kalarin and after marrying hundred and twenty six women he confesses to his mother that he finds no other woman as attractive as her. Appalled after hearing this she plots and succeeds to kill her son by pushing him into the well to save social sanctity. She commits suicide in the end.

Besides Nacha form another Chhattisgarhi folk form which Tanvir used was *Chandaini* also known as *Lorikayan* in Bihar. This form talks of love story between Lorik and Chanda. The nature of story told is secular and often runs till eighteen nights.

Regarding folk Dr. Nandini Sahu in the preface to her book *Folklore and The Alternative Modernities* writes about importance of folk in contemporary times:

And that, folk is not something out there in a museum, to be seen and appreciated from a distance. Rather, it is a part and parcel of our modern and postmodern literature, inspiring and influencing our modern literatures in a way that our classical literature have done. (Sahu viii)

Another modern aspect related to folk theatre is that women were always freely acting in folk theatre. Folk theatre supplemented modern Indian theatre and modern Indian theatre supplemented folk theatr. It becomes apparent that art forms are not fixed entities which can be separated into separate compartments. All forms are interacting with each

other and share a covalent bond with each other. Any attempt to affix notions of purity and fixity on any art form is a misguided one.

Tanvir through his experimentations with various theatrical art forms reveal how well different art forms can merge with each other by the use of imagination and creativity. If any label can be attached to theatre of Tanvir then it is most probably experimentation which is the spirit of Indian folk theatre, Indian modern theatre and theatre of roots movement.

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Use of Brechtian Techniques in *Charandas Chor*

Charandas Chor (1974-1975) is one of the most popular as well as critically acclaimed plays of Habib Tanvir. The play deals with issues related to state, religion and society. He, through this play exposes the hypocrisy and untruthfulness of people involved in these institutes. It is based on a Rajasthani folktale. In 1974, Tanvir heard this Rajasthani folk tale from Vijaydan Detha. By this time this story was not yet written into its Hindi version titled *Uljhan*. It is a two act play. The first act demonstrates time before Charandas took his vows and second act portrays time after.

Detha was unhappy with Tanvir for two reasons, first for not giving him royalty and for changing the end of the story. According to Detha's version Queen epitomized corruption and oppression. Her marriage to guru symbolized continuation of corruption, hypocrisy and oppression, "His chor gets killed, but that's not the end. The queen takes the guru as her consort, because in the story as written by Detha, in order to save face she proposes to the guru and the guru, who is very worldly, becomes her consort" (Katyal 66). On the other hand Tanvir provided anti-climax to his audience and portrayed Queen as more humane. In the end, a group of *satnamis* comes and places a white flag near the head of dead body of Charandas and this way he is turned into a hero. This serves as anti-climax to 'shocking' death of Charandas. When Charandas refuses to marry the queen, she lies at his feet and begs to never reveal to anyone what had just passed between them. He refuses to comply to this request as he had vowed to never lie and therefore she is left with no option but to completely do away with him if she wants to save her image. Hence to some levels she was forced to give order of death of Charandas. Regarding issue of royalty Tanvir politely gave check of ten thousand rupees to Detha which was accepted by him.

Tanvir gave definite instructions for the stage settings. It was to rectangular in shape (About six feet deep, twelve feet wide and nine inches high). Towards left side of the stage, at the back there would be a tree. Also there would be an orchestra group of panthi dancers and singers on the stage. The stage setting was very simple and minimalistic in the play. More bare space allowed more movement by actors. Katyal explains:

The open space suits the folk actor, with his dexterity and physical agility, and allows for the introduction of choreographed group of actors rather than through any re-ordering of the set or stage design. Props are kept to bare minimum, just those items that are actually used as part of the action-sacks of grain, the thief's bundle, the idol in the temple. (68)

Javed Mullik points out that there has been an inversion of hierarchy in the play, "There is a reversal of hierarchy, particularly on moral and ethical levels. Truthfulness, honesty, integrity, ethical rules and even professional efficiency are shown to belong exclusively to a thief, learning the upper echelons of society devoid precisely of these values and virtues" (Mullik 2).

As the title suggests, Charandas is the protagonist of the play. He is shown to be "clever and quick-witted, a true folk hero in the tradition of the subaltern trickster figure who outwits his social superiors" (Katyal 72). The turning point in his life comes when his Guru asks him to never steal again. Unable to comprehend this demand he asks his guru to accept four other pledges from him instead of one. The four promises made by Charandas were "that he will never lead a procession on elephant back, that he will never eat off a golden platter, that he will never marry a queen and that he will never accept the throne of a kingdom" (Katyal 64). Refusing to get caught in his trickery, his guru asks a fifth pledge from him which is that he would never lie. When Charandas made these vows he was

certain that he would never come across such circumstances in his life which would test his self- proposed four vows. But as the play proceeds he finds himself faced with same situations which he had renounced voluntarily.

This play underwent many improvisations before being crystalized in 1975. When Tanvir first performed this play in Khayal form he realized that this form was unsuitable for this play as it emphasized more on singing than acting. During Bhilai workshop he staged six shows of Thakur Pritipal Singh of approximately forty five minutes each. The last days of workshop coincided with a Satnami occasion. The satnam religion was started by guru Ghasidas who at one time was a dacoit. People from untouchable caste adopted this religion which emphasized the importance of truth. The followers of satnam religion are still forced to live outside village boundaries. There is separate well for them and they carry a stick with them for their protection. About Satnami group Tanvir said:

There are lakhs of Satnamis in this country and they've had a quite a history from Aurangzeb's time, quite militant. Every year they gather in Guru Ghasidas's place near Raipur, thousands, a great mela. They sing and dance. Like most untouchables they are given a separate muhalla or area, not in the village. In that muhalla they're given a chauraha (crossroads), a chowk. In that chowk they have a white flag, the Satnami flag, which is kept on a pedestal. (Katyal 65)

Satnami group governs on the ideology, "Truth is god, god is truth" (*satya hi ishwar hai, ishwar satya*). Since the theme was central both in play *Charandas Chor* and governing ideology of *Satnamis*, Tanvir decided to perform *Charandas Chor* for them though it was still in its raw form. At that time it was called *Chor Chor* and its time span was of about forty minutes. The play received enthusiastic response and this inspired him

to develop this play further. Some of *Satnami* influence seen in the play is incorporation of *panthi* dance and songs. *Amardas* was settled to be the title of the play in beginning but “Amardas happened to be one of the gurus of the *Satnamis*, and they protested at it being named after their guru. He tried another name but that also turned out to be a guru. Finally, Charandas was decided upon, and *Charandas the chor* remained” (Katyal 65).

When Shyam Benegal saw the rehearsals of the play while making documentary on Naya Theatre, he decided to make a movie based on this play. Since this movie was to be produced for Children’s Film Society a happy ending was demanded, to make it suitable for children’s viewership. Tanvir wrote screenplay for the movie. To give it a happy ending, Tanvir wrote a scene in which after his death Charandas entered heaven where he tore away the page on which his name was written from the register Chitragupta maintains of dead people. When he looked at Charandas with suspicious eyes, Charandas put crumpled paper in his mouth and swallowed it. When Yama himself came down to probe the matter Charandas stole his buffalo and escaped from his death. The movie ends with the scene of evening in backdrop and police havaldar chasing Charandas Chor. A new character of dishonest thief was inserted played by Madan Lal to enhance the goodness of Charandas played by Lalu Ram in the movie. The film was ready before the play was finalized.

The play underwent many changes. From the play he removed the character of dishonest thief. On advice of others when Tanvir tried introducing a foil to Charandas Chor in the play, he found that he was deviating from his ‘form’ of theatre, “I don’t need a foil, an actor can come on stage and simply declare that I’m a thief, my name is Charandas, that’s good enough for the stage. So I cut the foil out” (Katyal 66).

The other change he made was that he pulled off the scene of afterlife. Many of his peers along with his wife were against this decision yet he went ahead with it during show in Kamani (Delhi). In this show he however had used painted curtains to indicate different settings of play like village square, temple, queen's bedroom etc. These curtains were changed when chorus members came forward to sing and background was put to darkness. Later he did away with this also and action took place at different locations on stage. The characters, action and props in themselves revealed the setting of the play. This is yet another Brechtian technique. He was awarded with success as audiences appreciated this change. After performing four shows in Kamani, twelve shows were shown at Triveni followed by shows in Haryana.

Once the word got around about the popularity of play, Tanvir was invited by Ashok Sen, famous writer from Calcutta, to perform this play in Calcutta. Even Sombhu Mitra, famous Bengali director, actor and playwright came to watch this play. In this performance Govind Nirmalkar played the role of Charandas in this performance and later Deepak Trivedi enacted role of Charandas in other shows. Before Govind, Madan Lal enacted the role of Charandas. Later Ashok Mitra, Indian Marxist economist and politician invited Tanvir to perform his four plays, *Mitti ki gadi*, *Lala Shohrat Roi*, *Gaon Ka Naon Sasural*, *Mor Naon Damad* and *Charandas Chor*. Satyajit Ray, famous Bengali filmmaker came to watch these performances and liked all four of them. Nandikar invited him to stage the play *Charandas Chor* for the annual festival at his Fine Arts Academy Theatre. He was so impressed by the play that every year he invited Tanvir to come and stage a new play for festival but requested him to stage *Charandas Chor* also.

The death of Charandas continues to make audience uncomfortable and for that reason Tanvir believes the reason behind success of the play is death of charandas.

According to Tanvir it is hard to put this play in a definite category of either comedy or tragedy.

Tanvir chose Chhattisgarhi actors and Nacha form of Chhattisgarh to perform this play. About the role of Chhattisgarhi actors Tanvir said:

The actor's contribution in shaping the production was rich. It was mainly through improvisations. A scene like 'Guru Dakshina', one of the temple scenes, is almost entirely based on improvisation. Improvisation has become quite my style of direction now. Not everything comes from the director, or from the actor, but a lot of it comes from this process of improvisation, interpretation of different imaginations and consciousnesses. In the process there is a lot of muck, a lot of repetitiveness, but also lots of gems. You clutch on to the gems and cut out the rest. Then I rush to my desk to write it all down. But some scenes are written down in bold outline from the start. (Katyal 70)

Nacha is a Chhattisgarhi form of secular drama. The performance begins at nine o'clock and continues all night through. Three or four skits are also presented in between. The actors are usually peasants. About nacha actors Tanvir said in his interview to Sudhir Solankar titled *Can folk theatre speak to the city?*, "They are of course good analysts, not very articulate about what they are doing, but they are past masters at satirising things" (32). He gives example of popular nacha plays like *Sadhu nakal* (hypocrisy of sadhu is the theme) and *Jamadarin* (Jamadarin touches feet of a deity without causing fury in audience) to prove his point.

In reference to the use of folk form Bandopadhyay commented:

the directors interacting with the traditional and/ or folk theatres sought to go to the core of these forms, to catch their rhythms or motivating energies, gestural idioms, occasionally formal conventions or devices, and use them to convey a modern sensibility at work. (Bandopadhyay 427)

Tanvir by using nacha actors, nacha form, songs and dance have aptly used folk form to express problem of corruption and hypocrisy in modern world.

A lot of scenes were developed through repeated improvisations but some scenes remained the way they were initially decided by Tanvir. Scenes that took place in queen's place were that included in this 'bold outline' and remain the way they were planned at inception of the play. Another thing of significance in the play is that of incorporation of rituals,

The play opens with a ritual dance by a traditional panthi troupe belonging to the Satnami sect; and it ends with the solemn deification ceremony at the end, complete with a lighted lamp, the breaking of a coconut and the showering of flower petals, as the Satnamis file past their white flag, singing their anthem of Truth. A third point for a ritual is the scene in the temple, halfway through the play, when a hymn is sung on stage, a traditional devotional song based on the Ramayana. (Katyal 70-71)

The songs sung in the play were written by the folk poets Ganga Ram Sakhet and Swaran Kumar Sahu having Chhattisarhi tunes. The songs in the play articulates and comments on the significance of events in the play. Also

Apart from this, the live music and singing add an aural texture to the performance just as the rituals add a visual richness, enhancing the overall dramatic and theatrical experience; they underline the inclusion of an oral

tradition that is increasingly marginalized in contemporary performance.

(Katyul 71-72)

Presence of music is one prominent element seen in all his plays. He elaborates on importance of music,

It is difficult to conceive of our folk theatre without music and song. The basis of our classical theatre is also music and it was through this that Bharat Muni composed his grammar of performing arts called the *Natya Shastra*. Music is the sine qua non of our cultural expression, and not just music, dance too is an important component. Bharat Muni had conceived something like the 'total theatre', one in which *natya*, *nritya* and *sangeet* were all equally important. (Tanvir 142)

The playwrights who were members of IPTA like Tanvir were attracted to Brecht because it provided the "most apt means of communication, so that theatre could be taken to the people-a prime example is Habib Tanvir." (Dalmia 184) Tanvir rejected the techniques of realism and naturalism. He neither tried to make his plays logically appealing nor made his characters into complex psychological beings. Realism focused on 'reproduction of reality' while naturalism emphasized that nature of characters is shaped by hereditary factors and environment.

The difference between Brecht and Tanvir was in targeted audience. Tanvir tried to reach masses through his play while "Brecht was a highly elite writer. He was not a proletarian writer who wrote for the masses. In the whole design of his plays, when you think of it, he was addressing intellectuals" (Dalmia 189).

According to Girish Karnad, Brecht, "What he did was to sensitize us to the potentials of non-naturalistic techniques available in our own theatre." (Bodden 104)

Regarding Brecht's teachings Tanvir said:

And then I went abroad and saw Brecht and so many other theatres and came to realize that imitation doesn't take us anywhere and what the villagers do by way of simplicity of staging, the imaginative use of space, [with] regard to make-believe and the manner in which they deal with time, haunted me. (Tanvir 343)

Learning about Brecht made him realize about importance of folk and classical theatre of India and he therefore avoided any kind of imitation of western drama. He adopted techniques of Brecht because Brecht's theatre was similar to that of folk theatre of India,

I find him very contemporary, full of humour,...poetry, and meaning. So it was natural to take Brecht, especially because he's so open in his form, he's imbibed so much from the East, Eastern techniques, that for any Eastern man to take to Brecht to try out his own Eastern techniques is a natural thing. (Dalmia 255)

The use of songs in the play is in Brechtian style. The first song in the play is sung in praise of truth and guru. It says that nothing is better than truth and no one is greater than a guru. A guru is someone who joins one with the 'divine' truth. Since divine truth lies at higher level of consciousness, only a guru can reach at such heights and bring it to masses. It also conveys that the true leaders are the gurus and the truth is most precious thing because only few possess it. Later we come across a song which satirizes guru,

Is it salvation you want? Just

Give the guru his due

All learning is a sham till you

Give the guru his due

Nothing will work for you till you

Give the guru his due (1.1)

The song in the end of the play serves as the anticlimax. It prepares audience for the impending tragic end of Charandas. Another purpose which it serves is in the process of deification, wherein he is transformed into the status of god, “As the solemn ritual of deification takes place on stage, we see how a common man can become a legend, a saint or a folk hero, immortalised in song and myth; we see him take root in the hearts of the people” (Katyal 67).

The techniques inspired by Brechtian theatre which Tanvir used were ‘bare stage’, ‘the spare use of props’ and ‘the disinterest in working out the finer psychological details of character and plot’ (Dalmia 263). These techniques are commonly practiced in folk theatres also. The other technique was use of song to make social and political comment.

In his co-opting folk theatre he was not hesitant to make the required changes because “Tanvir was not interested in preserving any given traditional form intact; he did not insist on purity, on the ‘authenticity’, of any specific folk form” (Dalmia 255). Dalmia defends Tanvir against the accusation of using false form of folk when she wrote,

The possibility of striking a false ‘folksy’ note could thus be ruled out, since the play eventually reflected the player’s reception of Tanvir’s story ideas. [This was so because dialogues were improvised by actors] If Tanvir was responsible for the final assemblage, the composition of the play was collective. (Dalmia 256)

Regarding Brechtian technique, in the first scene of first act itself the fourth wall convention is broken when Havaldar asks for name of thief and Charandas says he can’t

tell him in front of all the people gathered here and takes him in the corner of stage. The fourth wall is a theatre practice according to which actors perform oblivious to the presence of audience, confining role of actors strictly as performers and role of audience strictly as spectators. Therefore fourth wall is an imaginary wall which maintains separation of performers and audience. Any direct interaction between the two leads to breaking of fourth wall convention.

Tanvir mocks how in modern times rank has become synonymous with moral values of a person and how it can be misleading. Havaladar introduces himself as Mister Babu Das, havaladar of the old cadre, calling forth respect for himself while calling Charandas names such as fool, swine, scoundrel, rogue, bastard etc. Charandas presents himself as washerman to havaladar when caught by him and hides stolen golden plate in bundle of clothes. Believing that washerman might know the name of thief, havaladar gives excuse of his 'noble' profession to summon trust when demanding name of thief from Charandas before giving prize which he intends to keep with himself:

CHARANDAS. Give me the reward

HAVALDAR. Tell me first!

CHARANDAS. First the reward.

HAVALDAR. You don't trust even a high-ranking officer like me, do you, you suspicious lowborn bastard? Here take two rupees. I'll give you more later.

Come now, out with it. (1. 1. 58-63)

Charandas then tells him it was the thief who stole. Havaladar asks for name and Charandas says, "He who steals, maharaj, is only called –thief. He has no other name."

(1.1)

The language is as close to as what people commonly use. It is crude and witty. Interaction between a peasant and Charandas reveals so:

PEASANT. Oh ho! Gobble me up raw, will you? I'll gobble you up, you damned hijra!

CHARANDAS. Come here yaar. (Affecting an effeminate manner) May I ask you something, my friend?

PEASANT. Ask away

CHARANDAS. Tell me, how did you guess? (The peasant laughs.) Shut up! Do I look like a hijra, you son of a bitch? (1.1)

In scene 1 we see interaction of Charandas with havaldar and two events where he steals. First he steals from a peasant. By use of threats and intimidation he steals from the peasant. On finding that the bundle which he stole from peasant contained only sattu, he called peasant back and shared sattu with him. When peasant hesitated Charandas forced him to seat which made peasant fall and there was clink of coins which were tied to the waistband of his loincloth. Charandas took coins from peasant and scared him away.

Then he saw a merchant's wife passing by him, bedecked with ornaments. Seeing her he started crying. On being asked why he was crying he told her he had bad news for her. He first told her that he was from the same village as her, Bhatgaon. She corrects him and tells him she is from Nandgaon. He tells her that he too is from Nandgaon and that bad news concerned Chhotey Babu who was very ill and was asking for his didi. To this she replies that he had no elder sister and that she was her bhabhi. Charandas again acts as if he got things muddled. Charandas asks her to come with him as Chotey Babu was about to die any time. Soon when they start walking Charandas exclaims, acting as if he remembered something and he told her a made up story of a recent robbery which took at same place

which they were passing through. He showed his own bundle of clothes lying there and told her it belonged to the man who was recently robbed and killed at same place. He then asks her to remove her ornaments and collect in the gamchha as a precaution. When he asks her to hand over gamchha to him by giving her the excuse that he was a man and therefore could safeguard ornaments better, the woman sees through the ploy of Charandas. Unable to threaten her with violence as she was woman he takes thrashes and abuses from her. At the end of scene Havaladar enters and Charandas starts polishing his shoes. When Havaladar looks down at his shoes, Charandas stealthily escapes.

In scene two, guru enters and the scene is staged in village square. The devotees sing song of praise of guru. They sing that the guru roams alone through forest. The householder stays in the home, a tramp roams the road and a guru roams in forest alone. The guru sits on the platform of village square and devotees come one by one to touch his feet. After taking blessing the devotees again join to sing. They sing that one can have anything one want only after giving guru 'his due'. This scene is criticizing the religious practices which demands money from the followers. This is yet another Brechtian technique wherein songs are used to pass an objective and distanced comment on a situation or character. A smoker, gambler and drunkard become devotees of guru and promise to give up their vices though we see they don't hold on to their promise for long. We also see guru being primarily concerned with his guru dakshina, most clearly in his interaction with drunkard.

GURU. Look, beta, nothing happens without guru dakshina. It's a must.

SMOKER. But I don't have any money, gurudev.

GURU (begs). Beta, if nothing else, at least fork out a few coins for a cup of tea.

SMOKER. Not a coin, guru-ji. Take it tomorrow.

GURU. Credit! All of you want credit! You tell me-how do I manage?

SMOKER. You tell me, guru-ji, how do I manage, without any money?

GURU (threatening him with his chimta). And you say you have no vices!

(As the smoker ducks, the guru notices a chillum tucked into his turban.)

What's this-a chillum! God is great! What disciples he blesses me with- a gambler, a drunkard, and a ganja addict! Praise be to God! Beta, since you don't have any money, let this chillum be your guru dakshina.

SMOKER. Gurudev, I gave up bidis because you asked me to, but I can't give up my ganja smoking (tries to snatch it back).

GURU. Arrey, arrey, arrey, beta, this belongs to the guru now! You can't just take back your dakshina, it's not done. Jai bholenath! Come, I'll give you mantra (breathes the mantra in his ear). (1.1)

To escape Havaldar, Charandas prostrates at the feet of guru in order to hide. Here guru knows Charandas is a thief yet he helps him to hide. When Havaldar leaves, Charandas asks guru to take him as his disciple. On being asked what does he do, Charandas answers he feels ashamed to tell guru that he is a thief. Guru poses a pre-condition in front of Charandas which is to give up stealing in order to become his disciple. On Charandas's failure to promise this, Guru says:

Arrey, do you mean to say everyone in this world lives by thievery? Get a job. Live honestly. Earn some respect. Is robbery the only way to make a living? Come on, speak up. You want me to be your guru, don't you? Then make a vow. Not a thousand vows-just one. Just give up one thing. (1. 2)

These words of guru prove to be somewhat ironical because guru himself robs people by making false promise of providing solution to their problems, *munim* stoops down to steal meager five golden coins, havaladar takes bribe and queen steals life of charandas to save her image.

Charandas for his vow promises to renounce four things, that he will never eat off a golden plate, will never mount an elephant to lead a procession, will never marry a queen and will never accept a throne if offered to him. These became his four vows. Thinking that stealing can't be done without lying, guru asks charandas to take another vow that he will never lie. To never lie became charandas' fifth vow. When he takes the fifth vow guru gives him boon of long life, "Well done! Bless you, my son. May you live long. (Gives him the mantra) Now, beta, let's come to brass tacks. What are you thinking of for your guru?" (1.2). Ironically it is this vow, to never lie which cuts short the life of charandas.

After taking his fifth vow he tells guru the truth that guru is no different from him, "Well, I steal at night, in the dark, stealthily, entering homes through holes in the wall- while you sit here in broad daylight, openly, with a crowd of people around you. And you make much more than I do" (1.2). Here Tanvir criticizes the turning of religious institutes into profit garnering system by people like guru. The scene two of act one ends with arrival of havaladar and dispersal of gathering. Guru and Charandas escapes with the help of chaos caused due to dispersal of gathered mass of devotees.

Scene three of act one takes place at verandah of landlord. In this scene, peasant and Charandas come face to face again. Seeing peasant crying he inquires the reason behind peasant's distress. Peasant tells him about terrible famine in the village and starving children. He then asks peasant to go to landlord and ask for some rice and in the meantime waits at the door observing the scene between landlord and peasant. Landlord straight

away refuses to give any rice to peasant and besides that hurls abuses at him. Seeing Charandas at door he mocks peasant if he had brought a strongman with him. When landlord asks Charandas who he was, he replies truthfully that he is a thief. He threatens landlord to give some rice to peasant otherwise he would steal landlord's entire stock of rice. On being refused again, he and peasant leave with the promise to return. After some time a troupe of *Rawat* dancers enter. Charandas and peasant are among them disguised as members of the dancing group. Everyone gets engrossed in performance and in the mean time they steal the entire stock of rice.

Scene four of Act one takes place at village square. Charandas and peasant sit down to distribute rice among gathered villagers who stand in a line. They sing a song in praise of Charandas. This song in Brechtian style serves as commentary on the corruption in modern times:

There are so many rogues about, who do not look like thieves,
Impressive turbans on their heads, softly shod their feet,
But open up their safes and you will surely see,
Stolen goods, ill-gotten wealth, riches got for free. (1. 4)

After the song, Landlord comes along with havaladar and tries to catch charandas but he escapes. The scene five of act one takes place at a temple where a puja is going on. A song is sung based on epic Ramayana, praising Rama. charandas enters in the temple followed by havaladar chasing after him. When havaladar leaves, he makes a sumptuous offering. Amazed at jewellery and gems offered, the priest asks charandas about his identity. He truthfully replies that he is a thief. Priest doesn't believe him and instead asks him to spend night in temple with him. In night after priest had gone to sleep, he steals everything valuable in temple besides his donated jewellery and gems. He even steals the

golden idol of god. A song follows in which it is said that everyone steals from king to gods,

The thief is a king, the king is a thief,
 The gods and the thieves, they dance cheek to cheek,
 The doctors themselves are too sick to take care,
 Oh, here comes the thief, out of thin air! (1. 5)

Another irony in play is that the only miracle seen despite presence of religious figures like guru and priest is Charandas managing to steal without lying.

CHARANDAS. Yes, gurudev, I've stuck to my vow never to tell a lie.

GURU. As you have stuck to stealing! Only you could manage such a miracle. (2.1)

In scene one of Act two we see that arrangements are being made to safeguard royal treasury. In this scene Charandas and guru meet again. Charandas plans to steal from royal treasury and guru warns him of newly appointed minister who is known to be very strict. Guru asks him to instead devote his life in looking after him. Here we see again that guru is principally concerned with his own benefit. Charandas not budged continues with his plan to steal and asks guru to keep the newly appointed minister busy in talk and bribes havaldar to take garland to guru and help guru in keeping minister busy. Tanvir here exposes the corruption in state institutes:

GURU. Why d'you want to send the havaldar?

CHARANDAS. Why so scared, guru-ji?

GURU. He's a government servant, isn't he? Shouldn't I be scared of him?

CHARANDAS. But he's a pal, guru-ji. (Act 2 Scene 1, 93)

While guru and havaldar keeps minister busy, Charandas dressed in the uniform of minister visits the treasury on the pretext of checking the security arrangements. He just steals five golden coins because his intention was to get in notice of queen. When munim finds out that only five coins have been stolen, he slyly steals five more, thinking no one will find out. He reports that ten coins were stolen.

Scene two of Act two takes place at royal court. On learning that everyone knew who thief was queen asks them to bring charandas. Purohit suggests a way to bring him in:

Charandas has sworn to his guru that he'll never tell a lie, and he takes great pride in keeping his word. My suggestion is that you make a public proclamation announcing that if charandas is truly as truthful as he claims, he should present himself at your durbar and confess his crime. He's sure to respond. (2. 2)

Scene three of Act two takes place in queen's court in palace and portrays first interaction between queen and charandas. He reveals to queen that he has taken only five coins and that is how munim is exposed. Impressed by his honesty she pardons him and gifts five golden coins which munim stole as reward to him for his honesty. He refuses to take this gift and says that he believes in keeping money earned by his 'hard work'. Honesty of Charandas is perceived as rudeness by queen. To this he replies,

QUEEN. Charandas, you may be honest but you're far too rude.

CHARANDAS. I can't tell the difference between being honest and being rude, rani-sahib. (2. 3)

Here Tanvir exposes the paradoxical nature of truth, which is partly appreciated as virtue and partly condemned as harsh. This is a postmodern insight as it defers the commonly upheld quality of truth it being universal and absolute.

The scene ends with queen giving orders for a procession to be organized which is to be led by charandas on elephant-back throughout the town and then bringing him back to durbar. The queen wanted to award him with state honours for his honesty.

In scene four of Act two Charandas turns down to lead the procession on elephant-back and this gets him arrested by minister.

Scene five of Act two which also happens to be the last scene of play takes place in Queen's bedroom. When she sees charandas tied up, she orders for him to be untied and asks her dasi to bring food for him on gold plate. When charandas again refuses to comply with her request, to eat offered food off from golden plate, she herself orders for him to be arrested and sends him to jail to be locked in. Later in night she gives keys of lock up to her maid and asks her to bring Charandas secretly to her bed chambers. When Charandas is brought to her she confesses her love for him to him. She requests him to marry her and become the king. These were the very things which he had vowed to never take in his third and fourth vow. Again he refuses these demands of queen. Queens urges him to give up his vows by giving following argument,

Since you took these vows as a joke, forget about them. Ask your guru to pardon you. Do penance, if necessary. We can hold an atonement ceremony and gather all the ascetics and holy men and fulfill all the ritual necessary to absolve you. We'll shower your guru with alms and ask for his forgiveness. Then we'll get married. All right? (2. 5)

In the end queen asks of him to never reveal what had just passed between them. To this he reminds her that he had made a vow to never lie. Queen then screams for her guard and attendants. Guards, maid, purohit and minister come running in. She tells them that charandas had escaped from prison and had come to her suggesting that she should

marry him. Charandas is killed by guards and no one interferes to save him. Tanvir humanizes queen by showing tears in her eyes and her running away from the scene.

Satnamis enter the stage in the end of scene and places a white flag near the head of dead body of Charandas. The last song praises truth and tells story of how charandas a common thief became famous by never breaking his vow to never lie.

Tanvir didn't let scene of death of charandas to develop into melodrama. He did so by introducing a song. This is synonymous with Brechtian technique of alienation effect which is apposite to catharsis. In this technique identification with character and plot is not promoted so as to hinder any sympathetic evaluation but intellectual one. This was done so by breaking fourth wall convention. This is done so by characters addressing audience directly. The alienation effect is also 'brought about by the actor and by directorial intervention, which destroyed the illusion that they mirrored reality and foregrounded their specificity and historicity, was done away with emotionality, an idea that Brecht himself had done much to propagate" (Dalmia 183).

Tanvir made settings of this play simple so that it could be easily staged in a village square or a proscenium stage in urban theatres. He made use of songs in order to make an objective comment on a character or situation.

When Peter Brook, English film and theatre director, came to India he met Tanvir and watched rehearsal of the play *Charandas Chor*. In an interview he mentioned Tanvir and commented on the play, "Tanvir's work comes from the village viewpoint. It's comic and it doesn't attack big social problems. It sticks to day-to day question of greed, hypocrisy and exploitation" (Dalmia 271). This gave publicity to his play and based on this publicity he with his team was invited to participate in Fringe Festival. From India it was only his theatre among the invited participants.

At Fringe Festival, the play won the first prize also known as Fringe First Award. Tanvir credited acting of his actors for this prize who acted with same ease and confidence with which they had acted in their own place. After winning the prize, Prime minister of India sent a letter of congratulations to him, High commissioner invited all the actors to have 'high tea' and praised them.

River side Studio (London) organizes Festival of India and for that Government of India decides the name of the play to be sent for performance. At that time David Gothard was the director of the Studio. Government of India decided to send a play of National School of Drama directed by Ebrahim Alkazi. After reading reviews of Brook on the play *Charandas Chor*, Gothard decided to instead invite Tanvir to stage his play for the festival. For two weeks they staged the play and each time it was full house.

It is well known that Tanvir had started to collect Chhattisgarhi folk songs in his days of involvement with IPTA. The songs surrounded Tanvir in the form of harvesting songs, childbirth songs, death songs, religious songs etc. He learned the folk music of regions where he held his workshops and blended them to suit the need of his theatre. Songs of Naya Theatre has traces of *Karma*, *Jawanra*, *Panhi*, *Sua*, *Chameni* and *Dalia*. Tanvir himself explained, "Sometimes, I also modify the music to make it blend. For example, I changed the rhythm of the tablain one folk song. In another I changed the tune a little" (Malik 154-155). The purity of a form didn't ensure harmony so in order to bring about harmony for different scenes in his play he blended different folk songs.

About folk form he says the form needs a catalyst to revitalize it. The aim should be to "Not to get back to the purity of the tradition but the beauty of what is relevant in the tradition. Not preservation but development along the lines on which it has been is the point." (Dalmia 33)

Brecht advises a way of using songs which is different from the customary ways of folk forms. The folk forms keep songs simple and direct while Brecht suggests

Music must strongly resist the smooth incorporation which is generally expected of it and turns it into an unthinking slavery...Music can make its point in a number of ways and with full independence, and can react in its own manner to the subjects dealt with; at the same time it can also quite simply help to lend variety to the entertainment. (Brecht 179-205)

Brecht provided different perspectives through the songs which made audience think without suggesting anything directly to them. This aspect of Brecht is used by Tanvir when one song sings praise of charandas (when he distributes rice to peasants) and the other warns about him.

Tanvir's daughter Nageen described the routine of preparation of songs by Naya Theatre to Katyal in personal correspondence. In it she discloses that Tanvir would spend weeks on a song. The orchestra members would be asked to repeat a line of the song repeatedly until they learnt the lyrics and tune. Any change to the original folk tune was hard to teach to these folk artists who had learned the original songs by heart. She believes that without songs Naya Theatre would have been incomplete.

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The Living Tale of Hirma: Things Lost and Gained

The Living Tale of Hirma deals with the struggle of adivasis against government accession of their land and resources, and cultural oppression in the name of development and progress. Also it exposes how the repressive state apparatus works. This play for the first time was performed at Railway Stadium, Bilaspur in September 1985. This play was translated in English from hindi by Anjum Katyal and Pratibha Katyal in 2005. The setting of the play is semi-historical. Tanvir in his preface of the play wrote, “If the reader finds that there is similarity between the story of Hirma and the late Pravar Chandra Bhanjdev, erstwhile ruler of the former state of Bastar, he or she would not be mistaken” (Tanvir 1). Safdar Hashmi after watching this play wrote, “Habib Tanvir’s latest play Hirma ki Amar Kahani is more overtly political than anything he has produced during the last ten years or so.” (Tanvir 66).

In the play, Hirma is the ruler of Titur Basna, a tribal state. Within few months of his coming to the throne, his state like other princely state was merged with government of India. Slowly and gradually government officials began to interfere in his decisions and took part of his estate. He began a protest against state and central government, demanding back his sovereign rule.

Tanvir tries to deal with the subject matter of play as objectively as possible. The play does not offer any solution but tries to reveal the complex situation of annexation by government of India of tribal areas. Kalhan is the narrator in the play but his narration proves to be misleading sometimes. In epilogue he adds more dilemma to the play:

...The thing is, we had assumed that with Hirma’s death, the root problem of Titur Basna would be resolved. But two years have passed, and I am

still caught up in the dilemma of whether we have managed to promote the development of Titur Basna or not. If not, then perhaps our ideas of development are wrong. Or else it is the adivasis who are wrong in their basic approach and point of view. Where does the mistake lie? And what kind of mistake is it? I still have no answers. (Tanvir 63)

Tanvir questions the suitability of democracy in tribal areas in the preface of the play:

The dilemma becomes more complex when we consider whether we are giving the tribal people a better alternative for governance. When we witness state elections fought, for instance, in Gujrat recently and won by an overwhelming majority almost immediately after genocide, not unlike the German national election fought by the Nazis in Hitler's times during the 1930's, then we get startled by the fact that the democratic system as we know it today also carries within it seeds of fascism, which ominously sprout forth every now and again, though they remain under wraps most of the time. (Tanvir 3)

R.T Bedre in his article *Habib Tanvir's The Living Tale of Hirma: Interrogation of the Popular Discourse on Democracy* wrote, "As the play is set in Accession times, it describes the conflict between the reluctant princely states and the government of India on the issue of Accession" (2). Tanvir has made use of the Brechtian technique, 'complex seeing' which "facilitates the readers/ viewers to look at the process of Accession from an objective viewpoint" (2). Brecht for the first time mentioned 'complex seeing' in his notes to the *Threepenny Opera* to emphasize detached participation of actors which allows them to critically think about play and not get submerged in it. In prologue, Kalhan, initially

collector of Raipur, capital of Titur Basna and later Chief Secretary of the state government informs the audience about the context of play:

Before this story began, the biggest issue facing me was how to replace the system of feudalism with democracy. This question faces me even today. The entire population of the state of Titur Basna is adivasi. This is a fact. Its whole life is according to the adivasi system, and one cannot label the adivasi system as a feudal system. But we saw feudalism in the adivasi rule of Titur Basna, and we began to work hard to introduce democratic values into this rule. In the course of this struggle, I saw many ups and downs. And this is the subject of our play. (Tanvir 9)

The audience for themselves can see that this is not true; and therefore, from passive role is moved to active participation.

Scene One of Part One begins with a song which speaks of paradoxical things and sets the mood of the play to be highly complicated. The first two paragraphs of the song are:

There was dark and there was light
 And the light was dark as night
 Tell me, how would you describe it?
 Know your goal, oh my heart, know your goal
 Jai jai Ram, jai jai Ram, jai jai Ram
 Both wide awake and fast asleep
 Now moved to laugh, now made to weep
 Tell me, what harvest was to reap?
 Know your goal, oh my heart, know your goal

Jai jai Ram, jai jai Ram, jai jai Ram (1.1.3-12)

Through this song Tanvir seems to reveal his intention for the play to be set as ambivalent in nature. At one side, government's oppressive steps to introduce democratic rule in Titur Basna is shown and then at the same time Hirma's focus is shown to be on preserving his own personal interest, that is regaining his throne. This becomes clear when many lives of adivasis is lost in protest and Hirma unflinchingly continues to politically navigate the protest to suit his own personal interest, which is restoration of his absolute rule.

Tanvir is cautious of not idealizing Hirma as he reveals his flaws too. The character of Hirma is based on Pravir Chandra and "In fact, all the events in the play are more or less true to his life" (Tanvir 2). About Chandra he wrote, "Pravir Chandra, all said and done, was simple man, and on the whole a kind man, though not without a trait of extraordinary cruelty in his vicious passion for virtue. He was both ostentatious and unassuming." (2) and "He was whimsical, some say a bit mad." (2) Closer to real life account, Tanvir kept an incident of a rickshaw puller coming to Hirma repeatedly asking for alms. Annoyed with him, Hirma cut off his hand.

A caring attitude of Hirma towards his people is also shown. People from different villages come up to him to recount their problems and he readily listens as well as offer solution to their problems. One such instance is when Lorma, a villager comes to report about dying cattle in his village. Failing to see any improvement in health of cattle even after giving raw turmeric, *phitkiri*, *gur* and buttermilk he comes to Hirma, requesting him to perform 'Angadeva puja'. Here we see that authority over religious practices too lies with Hirma along with other decision making powers. Instead of going for meeting with president of India, he prefers to do this puja by following its rigid custom of performing it

straight for eleven days and eleven nights. Custom requires him to walk bare feet to the village and so he covers forty to forty-five miles distance to the village of Komalnaar barefoot starting the same night.

In Scene One, we are introduced to tribal ways of living. In the season when seedlings begin to sprout, people of Titur Basna collectively donate seeds and store them in *devguri*. In times of scarcity, grains from devguri are then distributed among villagers. In tribal ways of living, instincts are given predominance over reason or logic. This is exemplified by following exchange between Renuka, who is wife of Kalhan and Hirma:

RENUKA. So why did you suddenly stop the wedding ceremony after doing only five pheras instead of the full seven?

HIRMA. I heard a voice from the skies ordering me to stop. So I stopped right there. (1.1)

Another instance which illustrates so is when Hirma decides to distribute prizes among villagers because in his dream he saw goddess Tantrik making prophesy that he will regain his absolute rule. He explains to Lorma:

The essence of adivasi life is Tantrik power and Tantrik power alone. Through the power of Tantra, the goddess appeared to me. She told me that very soon my rule would be freed of this government council of ministers, and I would regain control over my kingdom. In honour of that, I am distributing this gift. (1.1)

Problem related to ownership of forests and land is discussed through the character of Saheba. We first see him in Scene One of Part One. He comes to Hirma to complain about his land turning arid. His land turned arid because of continuous cultivation at the same spot for straight four years. Hirma grants him ten acres of land off the forest for

cultivation. Shifting cultivation pronounced as destructive for forests is actually a useful practice which allows pieces of land to rest and regain fertility. Later in Scene Two, we see Saheba being arrested by government officials on the charges of usurping government property.

According to Tanvir, the play, “It highlights the process of assimilation of a primitive people- a terrible process which has precedents all over the world” (Tanvir 4). Through the character of Dumraj, problem of assimilation has been represented. As a child he stayed in palace, under feudal rule of Hirma and when he went to study for college to Jabalpur, he was exposed to democratic state of governance. Hirma asks Kalhan to appoint Dumraj as *nayib tehsildar*. Later when he becomes part of government by taking up role of district magistrate, the true problem of assimilation becomes apparent. In Scene Two it is explicit. On being asked why he could not fetch Hirma by SP, Dumraj expresses his inability to emphasize his authority in front of Hirma. The following exchange demonstrates so:

SP. Then, when you were ordered to fetch Hirma, why did you send others and not go yourself?

DUMRAJ. I was waiting for Lorma at the gate.

SP. Sipahis were good enough to apprehend Lorma. And you could have entered the palace after catching Lorma.

DUMRAJ. Sir, the truth is, Maharaj still treats me as if I'm a house servant. And for me it's difficult to forget that I'm one of his men.

SP. One of his men? How?

BIRA. Arrey bhai, he's lal sahib. Grown up with us. Lal Sahib Dumraj Dev Singh, isn't it so?

DUMRAJ. Yes, sahib. That's the reason. I can't speak against him, nor can I help him. Also, when Maharaj talks badly about you all, I feel terrible. I feel as if he's speaking against me. (1.2)

Later in Scene Two when Dumraj reads order of government to Hirma, stating that his entire estate is to be subjected to custody of Superintendent of the court of wards, he slaps Dumraj midway and Dumraj merely continues to read the order. It also prohibits Hirma to address himself as Mahapurohit of Danteshwari Devi and nor lead procession in Dussehra celebration. Here government acts not just to curtail material means of Hirma's powers but religious too.

Another character which represents problem of assimilation is Bira, Hirma's younger brother. Most of the time he is drunk and his love for liquor is the reason for which Hirma denied him his rightful share in ancestral property. He feels scorned and is apprehensive about all the money and riches which Hirma distributes among villagers:

BIRA. Dada, I need two thousand rupees.

HIRMA. I don't have it.

BIRA. Bhauji!

HIRMA. I've told you I don't have it!

BIRA. The treasury's full and you say you don't have money?!

HIRMA. This money is not to be wasted on your drunken orgies. (1.1)

He takes sides with the government when he is made the king of Titur Basna and often gives useful advices to stop Hirma's subtle political moves yet his advices are unheeded. For example, he warned against releasing Baigin after Hirma was released from prison,

"I've released her, but I'm telling you [to Kalhan] again, this was not well done" (1.6).

Baigin by collecting women's support, later strengthened Hirma's movement for restoring his rule.

On behalf of government, he even goes to talk to people of Titur Basna protesting for Hirma's release in Lohirguda procession. He helps government officials to understand local custom, for example Dumraj's inability to stand up to Hirma by explaining that he grew up with them, that he was a *lal sahib* and was raised to follow orders of Hirma. In spite of siding with government, he favored tribal way of living and thus was torn between these two positions:

BIRA. Bhauji, you've started a revolt against the government!

BAIGIN. You government lackey!

BIRA. Rubbish! I 'm the ruler now. The government follows my orders!

BAIGIN. That's why the government has usurped our estate and you're doing nothing about it! (2.1)

Biru is removed from the throne when Hirma files a case against him of stealing two gold bars from Danteshwari Devi [Goddess]. When collector asks him to return gold bars, he replies that he would return. In the same scene (Part Two Scene Two) when Hirma asks him to return gold bars, he immediately does so.

Also in Scene One of Part One, conflict between Hirma and government become clear for the first time through his interaction with Bhajanram, a government minister appointed to help Hirma in his rule. On learning that he gave a piece of land of forest to Saheba, Bhajanram comes to complain and following exchange takes place between the two:

BHAJANRAM. Maharaj, what's all this?

Hirma. Why? What d'you mean?

BHAJANRAM. Lorma the manjhi was saying that you've decided to give ten acres to a farmer?

HIRMA. Yes, indeed.

BHAJANRAM. And you're distributing the treasury money amongst the peasants?

HIRMA. Whom else should I give it to?

BHAJANRAM. Surely you should have consulted me, Maharaj!

Hirma. What, do I have to ask your permission for every little thing now?

BHAJANRAM. Maharaj, after all the council of ministers has been appointed to help you. (1.1)

Scene Two takes place in office area of palace. The government decided that Hirma was in the way of development of Titur Basna. This becomes apparent in the introductory dialogue of Kalhan in Scene Two:

...It was only after gaining some distance from the place [Rainpur] that I could clearly see both the palace and its close relationship with the people of Titur Basna. The Chief Minister made me his chief secretary and summoned me to the capital. On the basis of my report, the government concluded that if somehow the palace could be weakened, then Titur Basna's path to development would be clear. (2.1)

Kalhan is not a trusted narratorial (narrator) voice in the play and audience has to constantly think for themselves. The events later in the play prove to be contrary in outlook compared to what Kalhan voices. The idea of development and progress upheld by government is questioned in Scene Seven of Part One. Scene Seven is set in Legislative Assembly. After winning Assembly elections from six constituencies out of total seven, six

men were nominated by Hirma to enter Assembly as representatives. Tanvir himself played the role of 1ST Member and the staunchest remarks during discussion comes from him. This scene reminds of agitprop theatre which made use of debate as a technique in theatre. During debate question of land is discussed. The land which once belonged to adivasis now belongs to government. 1ST Member raises following issues:

Traditionally, the adivasi held full rights to all the riches of the forest: Lac, harra, honey, gum, mango, berries, tendu. They subsisted on the sale of this produce, a little cultivation, and some hunting. Now all this is forbidden to them. Yet a few middle men and contractors are legally permitted to profit from the forest. Illicitly, hundreds of contractors and complicit government employees and forest officials are hacking down trees on a large scale. They are embezzling lacks from government funds. Doesn't this harm the forest? But let a single adivasi attempt to cut down a few trees and cultivate land according to his traditional way of life, and he is punished. It is said that he is destroying the forest. As a result he is being forced to turn from agriculture to manual labour. (1.7)

Another point made is related to art and culture. Songs and dances have flourished with the tribal way of life in Titur Basna but with change in this way of life, culture of Titur Basna is subjected to destruction: "Instead of creating a healthy environment for these arts, which are linked to their daily life, they are being reduced to mere exhibitions in big cities once or twice a year. Adivasi cultural wealth is being wiped out, in return for a smattering of awards to a few individuals" (1.7).

Then the idea of progress is debated upon. 3RD Member gives argument for progress. He says government is establishing schools for 'progress' of tribal people but

education which is divorced from their culture and doesn't hold any apparent profit for them makes it meaningless for them. 1ST Member emphasizes that one idea of progress is forced upon adivasis and their view is neither asked nor taken into consideration, "You [Government] deprive an entire people of their way of life, their beliefs, their history and their tradition, and then in turn accuse them of being no-good idlers, of being sunk in apathy, of turning away from the path of progress" (1.7)

Out of this debate nothing constructive comes up and 1ST Member alleges, "Your committees and your deliberations are nothing but a screen from behind which you hunt your prey" (1.7).

On many occasions the system of democracy comes under scrutiny in the play. For example, in Scene Three, government's inaction in the face of crisis is criticized. The scene begins with people coming to Hirma to report the famine in their village and frequent death of people due to it. Here governments lack of concern for farmers and villagers is exposed which is still a problem in modern times:

Firstly, the government has imposed an unnecessarily high levy on grain. Secondly, although we are facing a shortage, grain is being despatched to other regions where it is freely available. Thirdly, all the grain of the government levy-hundreds of sacks of it-has been lying in the government godowns in the eastern wing of the palace for two years now. That entire wing has been requisitioned by them. The roof is leaking, it has not been repaired, but the government has bothered neither to remove the stocks to a drier place, nor to give us back our own grain. (1.3)

Again the democratic system comes under attack in Part Two Scene One, which takes place on street of Raipur. Kalhan reports that the demand to restore Hirma to his

throne has turned into mass movement and Baigin Bai, Hirma's wife has started a women's movement for the same purpose. Several women clad in red saris fill the streets of Rainpur. It is interesting to note that nature of protest is democratic rather than confrontational. If democracy means rule of the people and by the people, then in case of Titur Basna, adivasis represented the true democratic rule and government represented the feudal as it made use of force to impose its decisions.

Instance which reveals the democratic way of life in Titur Basna is when villagers out rightly refuses to accept Bira as King even though legally he is. When he tries to stop Lohirguda procession, his authority is challenged by villagers:

BIRA. What are you all doing here? This is the planting season. Time to dance and sing. Time for the hunt. You should all return to your villages, peacefully. Celebrate. Be happy! And I'll celebrate with you! Dance, sing, I'm your Raja, your Mahaprabhu!

THREE. We don't accept you as Raja.

TWO. You've snatched the crown from Mahaprabhu.

FOUR. You've murdered Mahaprabhu!

BIRA. Says who?

FOUR. Says I. (1.4)

People of Titur Basna began protesting by refusing to pay lagan or taxes. The first instance of protest by Hirma was taking back his diamond ring from Renuka. This is discussed in the first song in prologue which talks of loss of throne, country, life, land, god, worship and devotion, and finger for the sake of diamond ring.

The second act of protest by Hirma was when he in Scene three decides to break open godown and distribute grain among needy farmers. His younger brother Bira tries to

stop him by calling forth the attention to illegality of the act. Here dilemma comes up if democracy is more legal or Hirma's rule and this question forms kernel of the play:

BIRA. Dada, don't break open the godown. It is an illegal act.

HIRMA. The government has acted illegally by giving my estate to the Court of Wards. You fool, how come you don't realize this? You dare to try and stop me! (1.3)

At the end of Scene Two of Part One, Hirma is informed of the lawsuit filed by rickshawpuller. It is a sole case of democracy providing means to common people to challenge feudal lords like Hirma for wrongdoings in the play.

Removing Hirma from the throne by levying charges of madness against him and making Bira the king without any proof is an example of power politics by the ruling government. First, argument of chopping of hand of rickshawpuller by Hirma was given to prove his madness. When Hirma challenged this argument by giving the reason that High court had dismissed the case against him then his demand for his absolute rule was given the reason:

COLLECTOR. In the month of January you toured Delhi, Lucknow and Cuttack and everywhere you gave a statement to the press that unless your estate was released from the Court of Wards, you would take the reigns of the administration into your own hands, and declare yourself independent.

HIRMA. You consider this an act of insanity, do you?

COLLECTOR. I will say nothing further on the subject. If this is not insanity, it is certainly rebellion. (Tanvir 27)

Hirma was then arrested for no particular reason.

Scene Four of Part One takes place at Lohriguda maidan and in this scene we see the first mass movement by adivasis to protest against government's decision which overthrew Hirma from the throne and made his younger brother the king. They don't accept Bira as their king and decides to march to the central jail where Hirma had been imprisoned. The nature of their protest was peaceful but Dumraj used violence to stop them from marching and adivasis in return retorted by shooting arrows. Thus the whole situation turned violent and some adivasis got killed

Scene Five of Part One takes place in jail. Kalhan reports that twelve adivasis were killed and case against fifty-nine people was started. Still demand for Hirma's freedom only grew and finally government decided to release Hirma on a precondition that he has to leave Titur Basna. Hirma then speaks against democratic rule:

Why are you people playing games with me? You speak of democracy, and in the name of democracy you destroy a princely state. You depose a rightful king whose right to rule goes back for generations, and replace him with a man who cannot take my place as long as I'm alive. (1.5)

Hirma also then poses one pre-condition that he would like to lead Dussehra procession one last time before leaving Titur Basna. Scene Six of Part One happens around Dussehra. It is interesting to note that the festival of Dussehra marks victory of goodness represented by Rama over evil, represented by Ravana. He spent the whole day closed in the temple of *Danteshwari* Devi and at the end of day claimed goddess had ordered him to take her with him. People who had begun to gather to meet Hirma when heard of this decided to go wherever goddess went, in other words where Hirma went. This could be passed as calculated move by Hirma. Seeing this, Kalhan requests him to not leave Titur Basna. Hirma reveals because of corruption democratic rule is not a right way of

governance in remote places like Titur Basna, “If even a small fraction of the huge budget of two crores which had been allocated for the development of Titur Basna had been used, we could have built a road of pure silver from Rainpur to Raipur!” (1.6)

Kalhan persuades him to participate in elections and become member of ruling party. He participates thinking he will win his estate back and wins elections by majority but not his estate.

In Part Two Scene Two, Dumraj informs the collector that the chaprasi who was sent to summon Hirma was attacked and killed by the adivasis. In another act of protest, adivasis on the command of Hirma had stalled the truck carrying the levy of paddy and had surrounded it.

In Scene Two of Part Two, plan to assassinate Hirma is formulated. Collector prepares a report on Hirma beforehand. The calculated and cold manner in which he was executed makes one question the value placed on human life in modern times and in democracy. Ruling government thought that with the death of Hirma, its absolute rule will be established. But Hirma in his death attained immortality as he became a myth. In this dialogue we see a premonition of what was going to happen, “You are forgetting that death is hovering over your heads too. Your writ is not likely to last very long. Don’t think of killing me. You can’t kill me. You have no idea of my power” (2.4) Ambiguity related to who won remains till end as Kalhan admits, “Sometimes one of us wins a point, at times the other; but it is very hard to assess who won and who lost in the finals” (2.3).

The nature of movement by adivasis is identified to be ‘economic’, ‘cultural’ and non-violent in nature by Hirma. The necessity for this movement arose because of imposed taxes and increase in prices of food grains:

KALHAN. Stop the levy, stop the requisition of paddy, rice at rupees four a kilo, what world are you living in?

HIRMA. The world that existed before you people came. If you leave us alone, even today it is possible to achieve. I didn't ask them to stop levy, merely to reduce it. I didn't ask them to stop the requisition of paddy, merely to reduce it. (2. 4)

Kalhan reminds him that such protest had happened in 1910 also and had resulted only in burning of villages and killing of many adivasis. This doesn't bother Hirma and he is irresolute in his decision to not let go off truck loaded with paddy. Here the truck becomes an excuse for government to attack him. Later when he releases the truck, the police and government official goes ahead with their plan to assassinate him.

Palace which was filled with adivasis is surrounded with armed police forces. The police plan to enter the palace on the pretext of locking up some prisoners in palace:

HIRMA. When will you people stop walking in and out of the palace?!

POLICE ONE. We are taking the prisoner to the lockup.

HIRMA. Can't you keep him in the police station for a day or two?

POLICE. There's no place in the police station. (2.5)

Prisoners among whom the rickshawpuller was also there, were trained and instructed by police to run away from them once they enter the palace and disperse and hide among the adivasis. In this chaos police would kill Hirma and that's what happened.

In epilogue Kalha reports that a Narangi Wale Baba claiming to be an incarnation of Hirma came to Titur Basna and people of Titur Basna believed it to be true. This way Hirma reemerges as a myth and so did threat to government's control over Titur Basna. The play ends with this note narrated by Kalhan,

Both this Narangi Wale Baba and the adivasis believe that Hirma can never die. That the police switched the bodies, and Hirma escaped into the jungle, to reappear when the time is right. So he has appeared in the form of this Narangi Wale Baba. Well, you can see how helpless we are (Kalhan exits).

(63)

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Conclusion

Tanvir's journey towards folk theatre was not a simple one. He had to face many hurdles and of which developing an equation with folk artists was one. When he was working with folk artists he was facing lot of problems and constant argument brewed between them. Then he realized the fault lay in his application of western drama technique and trying to force it on folk artists:

I saw the Nacha again and again, and what do I see? A big platform and they're performing; thousands of people or hundreds of people on a small platform or no platform, at the same level- still performing and nothing was lost. Or a stage, and some who didn't get a place and considered themselves special, coming and sitting on the stage with the orchestra and the actors; and I'd get very annoyed over this, but not actors. (Tanvir 333)

Therefore the folk artists were not used to western notions of fixed movements, position and speech but were used to improvisation. Some of the folk artists who were important members of Naya theatre were Thakur Ram, Madan Lal, Bhulwa, Lalu Ram, Brij Lal, Devi Lal and Fida Bai.

Tanvir expertized in Nacha form. Nacha is a Chhattisgarhi folk theatrical form, heavily based on improvisation. Tanvir describes, "The Nacha form is three or four skits, which go on all night, and in between they have dances and songs by men dressed as women" (Tanvir 335).

Typically plays by Tanvir begin with a song and end with a song. Folk singers are the orchestra members and sit on one side of stage in full view of audience. In the play *Charandas Chor*, he prepares audience for impending death of Charandas through a song

and reduces the chances of catharsis. Following Brechtian practices, he discouraged any situation in his play which could lead to catharsis. Songs are also used by him to provide socio-economic and political critique in the play.

In the play, *Charandas Chor*, the central theme is truth and in the play *The Living Tale of Hirma*, the central theme is political ambiguity and both are introduced through the songs.

Apart from facing personal and professional problems, Tanvir had to face problems from political scenario too. He and his group of actors came under attack when they staged the plays with political messages such as *Ponga Pandit* and *Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya Vo Janmya Hi Na*, a day before Independence in Gwalior. Despite, these plays being commissioned by the department of culture, government of Madhya Pradesh, ironically they received backlash only from political parties. They again came under attack on 18 August at Hoshangabad, on 19 at Seoni, on 20 at Balaghat and on 21 at Mandla. These continuous attacks reveal that nature of these attacks was politically motivated and strategically organized. In newspaper, The Indian Express, in reference to the attacks on the play *Ponga Pandit*, Kaptan Singh Solanki objections to the play were quoted:

What was objectionable [about the play], he [BJP organizing general secretary for MP, Kaptan Singh Solanki], while admitting that he had not seen the play, said he had been told ‘a man is shown entering a temple with shoes on. A jamadarin is shown striking a brahamin. This is a direct attack on our sanskriti [culture]. (Deshpande, 3620)

It is interesting to notice that the plays, *Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya Vo Janmya Hi Na* is written by famous hindi writer Asghar Wajahat and *Ponga Pandit* by Sukhram and Sitaram, Chhattisgarhi rural actors in 1930s. These plays were simply theatrical

adaptations of pre-existing texts and it makes it apparent the manipulated nature of protest against Tanvir, his team of actors and his plays. Only after 1992, incidentally the year in which Babri Masjid was demolished, that these plays came under attacks, which since 1960s were being performed all over the country peacefully.

Utpal Dutt conveys that if drama does not present social or political problem then it fails its primary purpose which is to connect people in his essay *Not Out of Thin Air* “A theatre that merely entertains and avoids any reference to real social or political problems will never be able subject the audience to stress and such an audience will not affiliate. Such a theatre denies the very reason theatre was created” (Dutt 148).

On his death he was given a state funeral. Rajeev Sethi remembered him in his essay, *An Uncommon Hero* as:

For most of us, Habib Tanvir remained best as a struggling pioneer who quixotically demonstrated the muscle of traditional theatre as a provocative and compelling format for story telling. His magic worked for even a blasé urban audience that came once in a while to savour exotica. (166)

Habib Tanvir was cautious of not bringing folk theatre to urban audience mindlessly. He learned an understanding and sensitivity towards folk art form and folk artists, along with development of political activism inside him during the time when he was a member of IPTA. After the dispersal of IPTA, he described his turning to folk theatre as ‘natural’. He described his attraction towards folk performance, “It was only natural that theatre should have looked for indigenous material, for innovative method and peasant resources. So the folk theatre techniques that one fell back upon was a most natural thing” (Dalmia 253).

His interaction with folk forms intensified along with the passage of his journey in theatre. Folk theatre has flexible form which allows it to be used for addressing current social issues. He also believed that the westernized urban theatre in India is incapable of aptly portraying problems of ‘modern’ India.

He, through his plays tried to overcome the dichotomy between rural and urban. By taking up folk and classical material he challenged the feudal values imbibed in them by putting them in modern context. Urban audience clearly identified with some of the oppression presented in them like based on caste, class, gender etc. Regarding use of folk form in context of gender Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker in her book *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory, and Urban Performance in India since 1947* wrote “the qualities of antirealism and anti-modernity allow these plays [Girish Karnad’s *Hayavadana* (1971), Chandrashekar Kambar’s *Jokumaraswami* (1972), and Habib Tanvir’s *Charandas Chor* (1974)] to place women at the center, represent Indian villages as a realm of ambivalent freedom and fulfillment, and offer a serious if not decisive challenge to patriarchy” (Dharwadker 15).

About Tanvir’s use of folk form Dalmia notes, “Folk art, as Tanvir practised it, was contemporary, not an exoticized ethnic item. And it was part of a continuum with the urban popular; it took a stance on current political issues” (Dalmia 272).

Sadanand Menon discussed how Habib Tanvir created his own niche in his essay *Playmaking as a Primary Act of Politics*:

He was to eventually evolve his work in two specific areas- one, to reclaim the space for new suggestive, allusive content more common to folk ballads and to a whole range of humorous and irreverent performances drawing upon the spirit of resistance embedded in native wit and irony. The other

area was rejection of the proscenium space in favour of a more fluid and unregulated theatrical space which contributed immensely to the participative character of his productions. (34)

During 1960s-1970s Ford Foundation entered into scenario of Indian Theatre and gave funds to the projects which were working with ‘folk material’. Habib Tanvir was among the first batch of playwrights who received funds from Ford Foundation. He named Tanvir along with Vijay Tendulkar to be shaper of “most definable contours of modern Indian theatre.” (35) Besides Naacha he also incorporated *Pandavani* and *Rai* dance. Also he never presented problems and solutions in his plays for reasons:

he decided to abandon the didactic route in art as explored by early Leftist theatre and work through allusion, suggestion and inference, enabling audiences to enjoy as well as draw their own political conclusions, so that they did not feel their realisation was externally induced. It led to the creation of a theatre without schooling. (36)

Dalmia identifies two ways in which folk theatre was put to use by urban Indian playwrights, first was for propagating political message by IPTA and second it “came to be used increasingly to manipulate and integrate into the grand national master narrative” in independent India (Dalmia 212). IPTA guidelines for playwrights didn’t pay importance to aesthetic qualities of folk and when it was used for reconstructing ‘Indian’ identity, its contemporary nature was ignored. Dalmia explains, “The folk performer is our contemporary, not a skirt-swishing, sword-brandishing exotic” (Dalmia 212).

During the course of his life, he received many awards, for example, Sangeet Natak Akademy Award (1969), Sangeet Natak Fellowship (1996), Padma shree Award (1983)

and Kalidas Samaan (1990) Padma Bhushan Award (2002). He was a member Rajyasabha from 1972-78.

Many scholars see development of ‘modern’ theatre as part of colonial enterprise. The British propagated European theatre in India by the means of three processes according to Erin B. Mee,

by touring productions to entertain their expatriate communities; by supporting productions of English plays staged by the expatriates themselves in newly erected British-style playhouse; and by teaching English drama in Indian universities, where Shakespeare was presented as the apex of British civilization. (Mee 1)

The British built theatres around port cities like Bombay and Calcutta around seventeenth century. In Bombay the first theatre was built in 1776 named as ‘Amateur Theatre’ and in Calcutta, ‘The Playhouse’ was built in 1753. Mee describes the reason behind building of theatres by British as, “Physically, these theatres were designed to remind their audiences of home: they were exact copies of their English counterparts, with a pit, gallery, dress boxes, painted perspective scenery, painted back-drops, wings, footlights, a front curtain and chandeliers” (Mee 43).

Indian businessman and philanthropist, Jugonnath Sunkersett donated land for re-erection of Amateur Theatre after it had gone bankrupt. Its name was changed to Grant Road Theatre and since it was built in an area pre-dominated by Indian, the Indians came to make up the majority in audience. This way western theatre opened for Indian audience which previously allowed exclusively European audience.

When Hindu College was formed in Calcutta in 1816, the students there began to study and enact plays by Shakespeare. This way western theatre attained preference over traditional theatre by becoming part of academics.

With introduction of western theatre, the concept of theatre underwent a huge shift. Things like newspaper reviews, tickets, fixed hours of performance, publicity and advertising came to determine the trajectory of success of plays. The behavior of audience too changed, who earlier used to actively participate in performance by cheering and shouting at moments of climax would now imitate British audience and would silently look at performance. Also improvisation came to an end and the actors were expected to say only the lines written in text.

Gokhale calls *Andhalyanchi Shala*, the first modern play in Marathi because it subscribed to realism mode of theatre and confined play to standard three act plays.

The effect of rise of ‘modern’ theatre in India was that it altered the traditional ways of performance of drama, “In the mid-nineteenth century, urban middle-class intellectuals began to build their own proscenium stages, to translate English plays into English languages and to write their own plays in the style of the modern European drama to which they were being exposed” (Mee 1). The very understanding of theatre underwent a shift from improvisation, non-linear and performance oriented with song and dance sequences to “playwright-initiated, text-driven and plot-based” (Mee 2). With rise in literary culture, the modern theatre being text based came to be categorized as superior and traditional theatre being performance based came to be seen as low or inferior.

To counter the disparaging effect of urban theatre over traditional theatre, theatre of roots movement was promoted by government of India. Regarding theatre of roots movement, Mee wrote, “The theatre of roots movement was the first conscious effort to

produce a body of work that synthesized modern European theatre and traditional Indian performance—creating a new, hybrid theatrical form” (Mee 5).

After independence, many playwrights adopted the techniques of folk culture, to counter the hegemony of western dramatic techniques. Guru Charan Behra in his book *Exploring Folk Culture: Trends in Post-independence Indian Drama*, explains:

The rich resources of folk culture, such as folk tales, songs, theatres, dances, rituals and even folk beliefs still kept alive by rural people and folk performers, and surviving as “traces” in cultural expression in villages and cities, have opened up various alternative approaches for many modern Indian writers in their attempt to convey their sense of the world. (Behra 1)

Badal Sircar gives the concept of ‘Third Theatre’ which is a synthesis between modern urban theatre and traditional village theatre. He explains why it is not viable to completely do away with western influenced urban theatre:

Today both theatres exist, each with its own strength and weakness, and it would be meaningless to select one and condemn the other. What we need to do is to analyze both the theatre forms to find the exact points of strength and weakness and their causes and that may give us the clue for an attempt to create a Theatre of Synthesis- a Third Theatre. (Sircar 2)

Mulk Raj Anand in his book, *The Indian Theatre*, published in 1951 too advocated the idea of synthesis of urban and traditional theatre to bring a “new kind of theatrical experience” (Anand 59).

Folk culture can be understood as the culture of the community, constituting “shared rituals and festivals, shared economic social customs, myths, fables and history” (Behra 11). It is also marked by oral tradition.

Behra explains the use of improvisation in folk theatre, “Actors had to improvise a lot to make it interesting and attractive because it presented myth-based stories familiar to the audience” (Behra 14). Folk theatre came into the focus of Indian playwrights when they tried to represent the struggle of common man, “This [folk culture] is a part of the common man’s perspective and the perspective of the marginalised” (Behra 15).

Many post-modern theories developed recently in west are found existing in folk art forms. Theories of anti-illusionistic modes and anti-realism given by theorists like Luigi Pirandello, Bertold Brecht, Joseph Chaikin, Antonin Artaud etc find their application in folk theatres of India. Luigi Pirandello in his play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921) introduced ‘metatheatrical mode’. This is found in folk-narrative tradition of India too, which talks of a story within the story. The concept of invisible fourth wall found in epic theatre of Brecht is very much there in folk theatre too where the distance between audience and actors is minimal and they are also participants in performance. Audience participates by expressing their views and state of emotion through cheering, clapping and hooting in mid-way of performance. Jerzi Grotowski’s ‘poor theatre’ emphasizes on minimalism which is also found in folk theatre. Folk form is not based on rationale but imagination. *Thanathu* are scene in folk theatre where rules of logic are inapplicable and it is considered to be highest point of imagination

Kapila Vatsyayan describes folk artists as carriers of socio-cultural change, “They [folk artists] have also been the vehicles of expression of protest, dissent and reforms, the carriers of reform movements and the articulators of satire and social comment and thus the instruments of socio-cultural change.” (Vatsayan 3)

Habib Tanvir blended folk and modern for functional purposes. He made use of elements from western dramas which were relevant and suitable for his theatre such as

Brechtian techniques. Here Behra makes use of Roman Jakobson's concept of the dominant to explain the nature of such blending of folk elements and elements of western theatre by Tanvir. Jakobson states that the dominant is, "the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines and transforms the remaining components" (Selden 15). Folk elements were put in the foreground and the western theatrical elements were molded to emphasis folk elements.

Behra emphasizes on importance of folk elements:

The use of folk elements, I can point out, thus establishes the living connection with our tradition, gives the work of art order and clarity of expression. It is a reflection upon the contemporary situation and sometimes functions as a critique on social inequality and moral depravity in the present times. (Behra 24)

What separates Tanvir from other playwrights who were working with folk form was that he was more focused on folk artists than forms:

I was not running after folk forms, I was running after folk actors, they brought the folk forms with them. And I did not really think a lot about the forms as such, I was freely using imagination to interpret a play and these actors had the forms. (Mallick XVIII)

Folk cultural tradition full of songs, dance and celebration is closer to the idea of 'carnival' by Bhaktin in which social hierarchy is denied. *Charandas Chor* and *The Living Tale of Hirma* both are subversive plays which challenges social hierarchy. Charandas four vows symbolically refer to renouncement of wealth, domination, exploitation and attraction towards female charm. In both plays the protagonists gain victory in their death.

Theatre of roots movement is ruled by an impulse to stage nonrealistic and indigenous styles of production. Since theatre was used by the British to disseminate their cultural values and paradigms in colonial times, it was natural for playwrights to subvert British authority using theatre. They did so by turning to Indian traditional theatrical art forms. Sangeet Natak Akademi organized series of festivals between 1984 to 1991 to help the artists who were striving to develop “a theatre idiom indigenous in character, inspired by the folk/ traditional theatre of the country” (Mee 11).

Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA) formalized and provided authenticity to the works of playwrights subscribing to theatre of roots movement. It is important to note that such works highly varied from each other as they employed different traditional forms from all over the India and nature of experimentation, blending of modern and folk, and creative impulses too varied. Mee explains “In fact, what the Akademi actually created was not a single ‘national theatre’ but a group of artists spread across the nation who used traditional performance in making of their modern theatre” (Mee 11). It followed the principle of ‘unity in diversity’ given by Jawaharlal Nehru. A single composite identity was not sought for Indian theatre but different theatrical traditions across India were validated as equally Indian theatre.

Western theatre being text-based emphasized on the authority of author over play and thus stipulated one point of view while Indian traditional theatre offered multiple voices because it was part of a tradition and underwent many changes over period of time. *The Living Tale of Hirma* is an example of such play which employs multiple voices and audience gets to witness multiple perspectives about same event (annexation of princely states by government of India).

One of the drawbacks of theatre of roots movement is that it is funded by government agencies and this way sometimes creativity and vision of playwrights working for this movement get compromised, over run by directions from government.

According to acultural theories of modernity, modernity is specifically located in west and co-relates modernization with development. We witness Tanvir challenging this theory in his play *Hirma: A Living Tale*, where he shows traditional society more functional in some aspects like community life than modern democratic system of governance.

Tanvir finds that there are some characteristics which are common to all folk plays of India:

The numerous forms of Indian folk theatre all share some common fundamental values. They all have an epic approach to story-telling in the theatre. Nearly all of them abound in songs, dances, pantomime, improvised repartees, imaginative movement, slapstick comedy, stylised acting, even acrobatics. Almost all of them usually cover a large canvas in their stories and denote change of location by movement and word of mouth rather than by a change of sets and décor. They often have a sort of stage manager, a comic character, who opens and establishes the play and provides the link scenes. (Katyul 92)

He gives reasons for as to why folk theatre is an apt form to be incorporated in modern theatre:

Even for thematic considerations of our times, some of the folk theatre techniques would appear to provide the aptest instrument of communication, if only for reasons of extreme flexibility of form, which has

so far apparently absorbed and reflected the changing social patterns of Indian rural society with a remarkable degree of success. (Katyal 94)

Folk art does not celebrate individual heroes but communities. He describes the way in which folk art should be approached, “Folk forms and songs should not be made mere vehicles of official propaganda but if intervention is made with empathy, in a manner so that their own concerns can be articulated in their own language and their own style, it can become a meaningful exercise” (Malik and Malik 149).

He organized frequent workshops so as to “absorb a vital folk tradition into new theatrical forms before that tradition completely evaporates” (Katyal 120).

He believes that an artist should not subscribe to any rule:

A similar work is at progress with the Natya Shastra, the compendium of ancient dramatic practices. When theatre practitioners develop blind faith in the text and want to follow everything written there they are making mistake. They think that first Bharata Muni made the rules and then Bhasha and other dramatists came along and wrote their master plays. An artiste must break rules and also form new rules, art breaks with tradition and also creates new traditions. (Tanvir 95)

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