

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borrowed its organizational structures, textual features, and performance conventions from Europe (especially England), superseded traditional and popular indigenous performance genres, and found its core audience among the growing English-educated Indian middle class.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. (Katyaval 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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