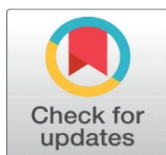
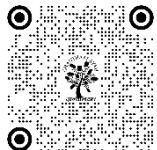


REVALUATION OF TRADITIONAL PERFORMING ARTS IN THE POST-INDEPENDENT INDIAN THEATRE

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ABSTRACT

Traditional performing arts are one of the important genres of folklore. Historically, since ancient times, the performing arts were used by the people for fulfilling their demands from rituals to entertainment. These forms had played a vital role in the construction of socio-cultural history in India. Interestingly, the ancient Indian society maintained both the folk and classical traditions equally with full enthusiasm. But with the onset of western theatre during colonial period, the traditional arts had been neglected. The almost forgotten traditional forms found new life with the emergence of freedom movements that made use of both traditional and modern forms. In the post-independence scenario, the values of these forms have been reinstated as they are the medium to construct or assert the cultural identity of different communities and the nation. Due to efforts of government of India, IPTA and other independent artistes, the folk-art tradition got revived in performing arts. Taking insights from various secondary sources and referring to the interviews (of the stalwarts of performing arts in India) put in the book Contemporary Indian Theatre of Sangeet Natak Akademi, this paper attempts to understand the process of revaluation and the emergence of new audience along with intellectual support for the folk theatre traditions. This paper also focuses on the various issues that have made impact on the structure and functions of these forms in the past few centuries with the special focus on the present status of folk forms. In doing so, references of the past experimentations and recent ones are made. The folk-art forms and traditions got transformed and to an extent devalued after the coming of cable/satellite television and social media. But this era is marked by some new experimentation in folk art and performing art traditions which is being referred to in this paper.

Keywords: Traditional Art, Classical Art, Popular Culture, Theatre, Performing Arts, Post-Colonialism, Liberalization



1. INTRODUCTION

Human beings ought to be complete beings when they perform the actions performed by the gods, heroes, or mythical ancestors. When performed, these actions become rituals that people seem to imitate. This concept of 'imitation' is a primary characteristic of theatrical or ritual performances. Kuritz (1988). Ritualistic activities are the origin of theatrical performances. Offerings and praying during social gatherings are the primary characteristics of ritualistic activity. These ritualistic and artistic expressions of humankind are being served by the theatrical performance; the most common art form found in every culture throughout the

ages. It is hard to define where and when theatrical performances originated, but it is legitimate to say that in every culture in history, people have used elements of theatre to communicate, educate, celebrate, and entertain. In most of the ritualistic ceremonies, strong theatrical performance components include body decoration, imaginative masks and costumes, repeated movements with expression, music, and dance. The basic elements of theatre, which were derived from ritualistic performances, are action based on a story (either myth, epic, real, etc.), performed in front of a group of audience members with supporting costumes and make-up to either teach or entertain.

Indian performance genres are vast since there is diversity in language, religion, caste, and culture. However, some commonalities can be found in the performance traditions of different regions. These performance traditions of folk and classical coexisted during the ancient period. The Sanskrit text "Natyasastra" is the main evidence, along with the other texts and plays.

Most of the Indian rituals, irrespective of which culture they represent, often include colourful performances that are part of the ritual events. The folk forms in India are mostly connected with temple rituals, drawing on ancient classical and folk traditions. *Kathakali*, *Bharatnatyam*, *Kathak*, *Mohiniyattam*, *Theyyam*, *Manipuri*, *Kuchipudi*, *Odissi*, *Sattriya Nritya* and *Devdasi* dance were/are associated with ritual traditions. The same is the case with the East-Asian countries and South-east Asia, which share the same history, mythical stories, and strong cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. Indonesian, Thai, Cambodian, Srilankan, and Japanese dance forms reflect these temple traditions. This region is marked by strong Islamic traditions too, where bowing to the Almighty, singing *Qawwali* and *Hamd*, beating or hurting themselves for remembering the sacrifice of their religious icons, or enacting the sacrificial rituals of Abraham, and dancing like the whirling dervishes of Sufi tradition come. India, interestingly, is the melting pot of many religious (Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Bahaism), and tribal traditions and their rituals. All these forms became part of the collective theatrical tradition of India post-independence from British rule.

These forms are part of the strong religious traditions of India. All these prominent classical and folk forms use makeup, masks, dance, or movement set to a musical rhythm, and often they tell a story associated with their deity/hero or almighty or idea of creation and greater being. Spectator-participation can be found in ritualistic performances. This is done to attain a specific sequence of events enacted precisely in rituals. It is a compulsory event to participate in the ritual performances to attain the vision of the god. With this tradition at hand, the theatre in India took different courses in the past many centuries. This whole development can be put into three different time frames. First during the colonial rule, then later the most prominent one during the post-independence times, and further after the year 1989 which saw some major changes in the mode of communication. The theatre traditions changed drastically during the colonial rule. The forms and styles which influenced in that era later countered in the post-independence and further taking a leap into the digital age of 21st century. In all these developments, what were the forms and styles used in the theatre and how it changed during this course need to be assessed. There was a whole reevaluation of traditional performing arts in the post-independent Indian theatre.

The research questions with respect to this paper are put here. The questions comprise of understanding the whole development of theatre in the post-independent India and how its forms and style got shaped. Further it questions, what types of theatrical expression existed during colonial rule and how does it

influence the Indian theatre traditions? Also, how did theatre traditions change in terms of form and style during the post-Independence era? The study also looked into what changes occurred in theatre traditions following the liberalization era, with the introduction of cable and satellite television? This coming of cable and satellite TV made available a competing medium against the existing traditional form of theatre. So, how did theatre have to compete with the electronic media and what is the future of theatrical traditions with respect to the present situation.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the use of traditional performing art forms in contemporary Indian theatre, as well as how those forms and styles were revalued in post-independence India. It also takes into account the earlier existing traditions of India to contrast the revaluation of art during different times.

The objectives of this study are to: identify the classical and folk performance traditions in the context of India; Trace the history of different performing arts traditions in the modern cultural history of India; Find out about the development of theatre in the post-1989 era; Ascertain how the revaluation of performing arts traditions happened in modern times in India.

2. RESEARCH APPROACH

Taking insights from various secondary sources and referring to the interviews (of the stalwarts of performing arts in India) put in the book *Contemporary Indian Theatre of Sangeet Natak Akademi*, this paper attempts to understand the process of revaluation and the emergence of new audience along with intellectual support for the folk theatre traditions. This paper also focuses on the various issues that have made impact on the structure and functions of these forms in the past few centuries, with the special focus on the present status of folk forms. In doing so, references of the past experimentations and recent ones are made. This is mostly secondary research, referring to different seminal books in the area of theatre and performing arts. Contemporary trends have been observed and related with the performing arts tradition.

In doing so, the entire discussion has been divided into two parts: the first discusses the differences between classical and folk theatrical performances in the context of India; and the second refers to various performing arts tradition in India's modern cultural history to discuss the evolution of theatre in the post-1989 era. The year, 1989, is important because of the Nehru Centenary Theatre Festival which was celebrated on the birth centenary of first Prime Minister of India who promoted theatre in the modern India. In the post-1989 era, due to rise of electronic media and the liberalization of the economy, a depreciation in expression and reception of folk art happened. The discussion progressed to a conclusion about the current state of folk traditions. At present, some new experiments in folk art and performing arts tradition have also been made, which are being referred to in this paper. The findings of this paper have been put into three sub-headings as per the objectives. First section talks about the distinction between the classical and folk performances in India. The second section deals with the theatre traditions during colonial rule and further development during the post-independence era and third sub-head discusses the development of theatre in the post-liberalization era. Before discussing all these points, it is pertinent to understand the distinction between the classical and folk performances in the context of India.

3. CLASSICAL VERSUS FOLK PERFORMANCES IN INDIA

Some performances are characterized by high degree of fine-tuning in performance technique. They are with well-articulated aesthetic principles, based on ancient texts and with legacy of practice. Spectators with their knowledge of expertise, on elaborations, refinements, and accompaniments, appreciate performances. These performances come under the classical performance traditions, which are continual (patronized by people of high class and caste of Indian society) and always developed or refined by *gurus* (masters) within the limitations of the tradition. *Kathakali*, *Bharatnatyam*, *Kathak*, *Mohiniyattam*, *Theyyam*, *Manipuri*, *Kuchipudi*, *Odissi*, *Sattriya Nritya* or enactments based on *Natyashastra* are such examples of classical performances.

In contrast to the classical performances (patronized by high class and caste), folk performances (patronized by low class, caste, and tribal people) are characterized with immediate accessibility. They are regional and belong to a specific community and language. Unlike sacred and devotional, the impact of folk performance is predominantly secular. The secular in folk performances is neither against religion, nor suggests hostility to religion but opposes relations of domination within it and the society. It is used to educate, to question against suppression along with entertainment, irrespective of caste, creed, and religion [Rangacharya \(1980\)](#). Though *Kathak* is a *Natyashastra*-based classical dance form, it evolved during the Bhakti Movement and later under the patronage of Muslim kings and queens. This dance form has a huge amalgamation of cultures and more popularity among the audiences.

Tribal people reflect a strong connection to music and dance. The folk tradition is visible in their many religious ceremonies and rituals. Mostly their idea is to imitate the Mother Nature and its different forms to celebrate life and new beginning or mourn the end of life. Some of the examples of tribal folk forms are *Chhau*, *Pika*, *Santhali* dance, Bamboo Dance, *Kalbelia* (Snake Dance), *Elelakkardi* dance (Kerala, Fighting the wild bear), *Bhagoria* dance (ritual for selecting partners for life), *Dhimsa* dance of Andhra Pradesh, *Shad Suk Mynsiem* of Meghalaya (thanksgiving dance). Apart from these some dance forms are related to the agricultural practices or beginning of the sowing season or cutting of the crops. Dance forms like *Garba*, *Bihu*, *Gidda*, etc are such. In these forms, audience expertise is not required to appreciate the performances but the performance appeals to the masses.

4. PERFORMING ARTS IN THE MODERN CULTURAL HISTORY OF INDIA

India has witnessed multiple changes in economic, social, and cultural lives from time to time by invasions and cultural reformations. Interestingly cultural life and performing art forms retained their identity and importance along with enticing changes. But during the colonial period traditional art forms have lost their importance and almost forgotten by the urban population because of major changes happened during British colonized India from 1757 (first victory on the battle of Plassey in Bengal) to 1947 [Chatterjee \(2007\)](#). Bengal was the birthplace of modern Indian theatre during the colonial period. The first performance was given for the settlements of Europe at then-Calcutta (now Kolkata), and it was for the interest and enjoyment of the European people. *Kalpanik Sangbadal*, a Bengali adaptation of M. Jodrell's English farce "Disguise," was played in Calcutta on Friday, November 27th, 1795, at the New Theatre in Doomtola. With the help of a Bengali

linguist, Babu Goloknath Das, the play was translated and staged by Gerasim Stepanovich Lebedeff (1749-1817), a Russian bandleader and dramatist. The popular melodies from Bengali poet Bharat Chandra Roy's romantic story Vidya-Sundar were adapted to music. The characters were played by native actors of both sexes at the initial performance. On November 27th, 200 Calcutta residents attended the first Western-style Bengali play ever presented, and the production was a success. [Singh \(2009\) 56-59](#), [Das Gupta \(2009\) 232-238](#)

The first modern performance was a hybrid with intercultural features, involving a Russian's translation of an English play into Indian language, local artists of both sexes, and indigenous lyrics and music were used. The involvement of Lebedeff in the theatre has piqued the interest of Indian theatre practitioners. Bengali theatre had a direct impact on Marathi and Parsi theatre, as well as a rambling impact on Indian theatre. Many Bengalis formed their own theatre companies and began presenting plays influenced by western culture. Vishnudas Bhave, the founder of the Marathi theatre, staged the first ticketed performance in 1853. [Gokhale \(2000\) 5-8](#) Parsi theatre later became India's first commercial theatre. The theatre that arose in various parts of India used European techniques, pomp, and indigenous forms to great effect in the subcontinent. Many vernacular theatres in India use these (Marathi and Parsi) theatres and incidents as their starting point.

Till then, traditional forms like *Jatra* (West Bengal), *Nautanki* (Uttar Pradesh), *Tamasha* (Maharashtra), *Bhavai* (Gujarat), *Theru-kothu* (Tamil Nadu), *Yakshagana* (Karnataka, Kerala), *Burrakatha* (Andhra Pradesh) and *Harikatha* (Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, and Karnataka) were the popular medium of entertainment and education in India. Because of the impact of first modern performance by Lebedeff, and English education in India, in different parts of India traditional performances lost their attention and they were considered as an outdated by most of the Indian theatre practitioners. Indian theatre scholars neglected the traditional theatre by following European predecessors, and focused on the only genre, which is borrowed, and considering it as the "modern" and representative national theatre.

By the first decade of nineteenth century, the necessary condition for enlightenment/ being modern is freedom of thought. Expressing this freedom of thought is essential for a society and culture to be modern in their perspective towards various facets of life, culture, and society. The importance given to this freedom of thought in the field of theatre in modern India can be traced back to the establishment of Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) from 1941. An open disagreement of colonialism has been expressed in the theatre by preferring plays showing the desire of nationalism, and nativism explicitly or in an implied fashion. The adoption and adaptation of the essence of indigenous performances is an indicator of this disagreement with colonialism and western theatre, which is an indicator of colonial rule.

Encouraged by the idea of the convergence of folk, traditional, and classical theatre by IPTA during the independence period, Sangeet Natak Akademi (National Academy of Music and Theatre established by the Government of India in 1952), encouraged the "Theater of Roots' movement under the guidance of Suresh Awasthi (1918–2004), General Secretary of the Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA, 1965–75) and former chair of the National School of Drama (1986–88). Awasthi coined the term "Theatre of Roots" to refer back to the roots of traditional and folk performance as part of nationalism and as a counter to the Western-inspired modern theatre in India. The roots movement continued until the 1990s. Though there are conflicts among the scholars regarding the concept of 'national', the idea can be understood

as revivalism and a counter to the European institution of theatrical elements introduced during the colonial period. It is also termed as the rejection of European theatrical elements in Indian theatre. It is both decolonization and reconstruction as a "modern initiative for the old." [Awasthi and Schechner \(1989\)](#)

Suresh Awasthi conducted a "Round Table on the Contemporary Relevance of Folk Theatre" in 1971, where a discussion took place on the adaptation of folk traditions for the urban stage. Another important event organized by the SNA came thirty-three years after the first drama seminar. Sangeet Natak Akademi organized a contemporary theatre festival in September 1989 to commemorate the birth centenary of India's first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. The former PM was a theatre enthusiast and is considered by many as the architect of modern India. This festival of two weeks captured the best of theatre practice available in that time period. The festival had consecutive performances during the two-week period, with informal discussions among the participants. The works of twenty-six contemporary practitioners were presented at this festival. A companion project for this festival was the publication "Contemporary Indian Theatre: Interviews with Playwrights and Directors" brought out by the Sangeet Natak Akademi. This book was a collection of interviews with nineteen festival participants (Utpal Dutt, Chandrasekhar Kambar, Mohit Chattopadhyaya, Rajinder Nath, Kumar Roy,

K. N. Panikkar, Shyamanand Jalan, Girish Karnad, B. V. Karanth, Dharamvir Bharati, Satyadev Dubey, G. P. Deshpande, Shreeram Lagoo, B. M. Shah, Ratan Thiyam, Jabbar Patel, Mahesh Elkunchwar, Vijaya Mehta, and Habib Tanvir) and critical essays on the remaining seven (Bijon Bhattacharya, Bhasa, Mohan Rakesh, Adya Rangacharya, Vijay Tendulkar, Madhu Rye, Pravin Joshi) who were not available for personal comment (they were all not alive by that time). [Paul \(2006\)](#), [Awasthi and Schechner \(1989\)](#)

The festival is appreciated for the significant plays presented as a 'retrospective' of the Indian inheritance. Playwrights and directors, who built up the Indian theatre post-independence, were represented with their plays (the names are mentioned above who became the part of the seminal book on theatre). The festival included productions in eight languages (Sanskrit, Kannada, Marathi, Hindi, Bengali, Manipuri, etc.). The term retrospective represented the decades back theatre and traditional practices. The festival represented major trends (in writing and presentation styles) from independence period (*Nabanna*, 1944, disambiguation) to the present decade (*Chakravayuh*, 1984, Army Formation). The festival was unique in a sense that the most of the theatre practitioners were asked to recreate their work, which they had introduced many years ago. [Paul \(2006\)](#)

Some of the plays in the festival used the traditional elements for the contemporary plays. *Kallol* of People's Little Theatre, directed by Utpal Dutt used *Jatra* elements and film clippings for the performance, Chandrasekhar Kambar's *Jokumaraswami* with the theme of land to the tiller used interplay of argument in verse. B.V. Karanth directed the play by using *Bayalatta*, a folk theatre form of *Kannada*. Another *Kannada* play *Hayavadana* written by Girish Karnad was also directed by B. V. Karanth. This play was a modern adaptation by Karnad of the Indian folktale in which Lord Ganesha, the god of human body and elephant head, stands as a symbol for human incompleteness. This play was recognized by the critics for bringing the contemporary Indian theatre to its traditional roots. Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghasiram Kotwal*, directed by Jabbar Patel with the theme of women exploitation in the feudal society used the *Konkan Khela* folk tradition for 'human wall'. Various folk forms of dance from the western coastal areas of Maharashtra region were used. Music and singing were also incorporated in this production. It is observed by

theatre researchers that its integration of various folk forms of dance raised this production above all other experiments with Indian folk traditions. *Agra Bazar* written and directed by Habib Tanvir started to rediscover indigenous performances and performers for the modern audience who were either known to folk or western influenced theatres. The play was performed by *Naacha* folk artists from Chhattisgarh with whom Tanvir worked. It opened an eye for modern actors to learn folk performances and on the other hand, folk performers to play in modern drama. The other performance, which got highly appreciated, was The Chorus Repertory Company's *Chakravyuh* directed by Ratan Thiyam and written by Bhasa. The actors with stunning display of traditional Manipuri martial arts, singing, and dancing with spellbound mood, emotion, and color created by light, elevated the production level of Thiyam. Another great production of 'theatre of roots' was K. N. Panikkar's recreation of *Urubhangam* by Bhasa. Panikkar brought back the Sanskrit language on stage. This play was written by Bhasa during second century B.C. in Sanskrit. The tradition of *Kutiyattam* (from Kerala) highly expressive narrative-mime and music structures was used in this play. It is notable that Ratan Thiyam and K. N. Panikkar were both deeply involved with tradition and presented their knowledge of universal theatre in their directing. Another play which got attention by the tradition, was Dharamvir Bharati's *Andha-Yug* directed by Satya Dev Dubey. The set with the background of Mahabharata story and connected to the contemporary situation was a remarkable sense of seeing the epics with the new crystal. [Kavita \(1991\) 168-177](#), [Bharucha \(1993\) 206-209](#), [Awasthi and Schechner R. \(1989\) 48-69](#).

The First Drama Seminar of 1956, organized by Sangeet Natak Akademi, has established nationalistic practice in the art traditions of India. This movement was led by Theatre of the Roots and had been rigorously practiced till 1989, with the help of financial support (primarily from the central government and partly by the state government and other organisations) and the theatre practitioners' strong search for indigenous idiom in their practice. The 1989 Nehru Centenary Theatre Festival was a remarkable event of theatre 'retrospective' by Sangeet Natak Akademi. The festival-cum-Round Table organized by the Sangeet Natak Akademi has manufactured a conceptual time warp between practitioners of modern theatre and 'traditional' performance [Indian Drama in Retrospect \(2007\)](#). It also institutionalized the appropriation of traditional performance. Sangeet Natak Akademi, on the other hand, inadvertently reduced traditional performance to decorative art forms, resulting in scrambled conversations in the genre of the performances. It also sidelined other kinds of theatre that did not incorporate traditional performance. By 1989, the 'theatre of roots' was no longer a movement, the Sangeet Natak Akademi had turned it into a style [Mee \(2007\) 180](#). By the 1990s, theatre practitioners had explored new trends in their practice in theatre.

5. POST-1989: THE ERA OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA, LIBERALIZATION AND DEPRECIATION OF FOLK ART

Post-1989, India saw too many changes and development in terms of society, culture, polity, and economy. The theatre also couldn't remain untouched by those developments. As mentioned earlier, in 1989, a retrospective theatre festival happened in memory of the first Prime Minister of India on his birth centennial. [Awasthi and Schechner \(1989\)](#) And the post-1990s saw liberalization, privatization, and globalization being adopted in India. This was the time cable television started with a blend of western channels and content. This was also the beginning of the WWW (World Wide Web). [Kumar \(2018\)](#). So, one can observe that commercial TV

owned by private companies was booming in this phase, and a new avenue of digital online platforms were also born. Theatre, being a traditional art, had to mark its prominence among these new mediums of entertainment with new forms and content, shaping the taste of the audience as well as the culture of a country. [Kavita \(1991\)](#). Many scholars have critiqued this impact of TV and western content on a country in terms of cultural imperialism and cultural hegemony. [Gramsci \(1971\)](#), [Heywood \(1994\)](#)

The retrospective seminar of 1989, sadly, didn't give much hope for the Indian theatre, as many theatre practitioners and scholars criticized the status of theatre at that time. The big show ultimately proved that Indian theatre has not gone anywhere, particularly after the golden age of the '60s and '70s. post-independence, we became conscious of a national identity. We looked for folk forms. [Jain \(2013\)](#).

However, since the 1990s, there has been a significant shift in the consumption of art and culture, with globalization and market opening shaping tastes, attributes, and, consequently, content. After the 1990s, TV entered deeply into the lives of the Indian population. Thus, the rise of pop culture happened with the influence of western content dubbed or refined in the context of India. This was facilitated with the advent of cable and later satellite TV. This is also the time when Bollywood saw its golden era in terms of commercial hits due to the opening of the markets. It also changed the audience's taste, which has shifted from the hero avenging his loss to the hero wooing his girl and in the process doing everything to get her. In this consumption pattern, the content is being manufactured for mass consumption. [Kumar \(2018\)](#), [Bose \(2006\)](#)

Theatre still remained an art form appealing to a niche audience who are affluent enough to spend money to watch a play on the stage. There is another class of college-going youth who runs theatre clubs, shows and festivals to promote theatre apart from studying performing arts. There are some state sponsored theatre festivals too but the convenience of watching televised entertainment content/OTT content at home has reduced the audience to such plays except limited to urban centres. The TV/OTT content and cinema on the other hand are more refined, dramatized, multi-camera recorded and edited content with more detailing and focus on terms of camera usage (high end technology). It also uses big star cast to attract audience. This content is available for the audience to enjoy and appreciate the Art. This popular art of cinema has some input from different traditions of art (say, Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Literature, Music, Performing), but a proper understanding in terms of appreciating the Art was missing in the audience.

Theatre, one of the seven prominent art forms, has to change with time and reinvent itself with the changing tastes of the audience and the prominence of popular culture through TV/OTT content, and cinema. In fact, the theatre adopted some aspects of these mass media to keep attracting audiences. With the boom in the TV and film industries, there is an ever-growing need to find professionals for the same, thus many institutions are offering courses in theatre and music. But the professionals are mostly focused on producing professionals for mass culture, i.e., TV and films. Mostly TV and cinema produce entertainments products for mass consumption rather than inciting thought. As a result, art has now become more concerned with creating consumable drama content for mass consumption using elements of popular culture. These entertainment products are the amalgamation of forms and styles of different media. Though this development also brought some new avenues for experimentation in theatre, the field as a whole didn't gain anything. The traditional classical and folk forms were simply lifted from their

natural context and superficially inserted into the plays to add a bit of coherence to the theatrical play. But it didn't help classical and folk theatre at all.

Often, plays have become no more than emporium theatre, boosted by government grants, and peddled abroad. The playwright, Elkunchwar, complained that "the urban artist has become exploitative, a kleptomaniac." He steals song, dance, and colour from the rural. He lifts bits of tradition and then decorates his art with it. Like icing on cake." [Jain \(2013\)](#).

In the past four decades, the government focused on the folk and classical traditions through state-owned TV and different programmes run by the Ministry of Culture. Theatre stalwarts like K. N. Panikkar, Ratan Thiyam, Habib Tanvir, M.K. Raina, Girish Karnad, Tom Alter, Ebrahim Alkazi, Mohan Agashe, Dina Pathak, Zohra Sehgal, and Gulzar contributed a lot in promoting theatre with the classical and folk traditions. But the loss of audience due to shift towards westernized content on TV and cinema, non-availability of proper funding and lack of innovation in the idea and its treatment contributed in the less experimentation in the area of theatre influenced by classical and folk culture.

However, even in the area of cinema, much experimentation has been done with respect to the classical and folk traditions, but they are very confined in terms of the expression, screening and audience. Satyadev Dubey, Tom Alter, Girish Karnad, Mani Kaul, Kumar Shahani, Shyam Benegal, Pankaj Kapoor, Naseeruddin Shah, Kundan Shah, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, Chandraprakash Dwivedi, and others did some experimentations to amalgamate different theatre traditions.

To some extent, the coming of online media and the availability of content on OTT platforms are providing more space and screens to display the message. There is a dedicated channel for theatre on Tata Play (earlier Sky). In reality, however, it does not contribute much to the theatre, particularly the folk and classical traditions. Day by day, mass consumption of popular culture [Kumar \(2018\)](#) is happening with the fusion of some folk traditions, but the original artistes and their art are not getting enough representation.

In the past few decades, in the era of instant utsavs, folk forms have been ritualized. In 1989, Dr Jabbar Patel, who directed Ghasiram Kotwal, said, "His play was a post- independence look at grassroots to find a new format." Today we choreograph the rituals. We have not really presented the soul. The modern application of all this has yet to come out." [Jain \(1989\)](#). Even today, with the availability of new media and other forms, not much has been achieved in the promotion of folk forms. The modern application has yet to see the full expression.

Although some experimentation in terms of organising online theatre festivals where pre- recorded online plays are being shown to the audience, which got some impressive response, this is limited to the COVID-19 phase. Two such examples are: (i) A twelve day online national theatre festival (Sept 5-16, 2020) organised by Prayogam Theatre Group in collaboration with Department of Theatre Arts, University of Hyderabad; and (ii) Online Multilingual Drama Festival from 8-14 March 2022 organised by Abhinaya Theatre Trust in collaboration with Department of Language and Culture, Government of Telangana. This was used as a measure to reach the home-restricted audience during the pandemic through the online medium. This initiative got a good response, but how it can be promoted further in the future and gather a larger audience is the question. In the post-COVID-19 phase, the audience response has to be reevaluated. Also, Mimes, solo acts and stand-up comedy are some limited formats available through online media.

6. CONCLUSION

Using traditional forms in modern practice became a sign of modernity, a concept contradictory to the idea in the colonial period. In his lecture "Our Modernity," Partha Chatterjee mentions "those days and these days" of Rajnaryan Basu. What we consider "modern" according to Basu when compared to western ideology may not be considered modern in other contexts [Chatterjee \(2007\)](#). Thus, he mentions that "there cannot be just one modernity irrespective of geography, time, environment, or social conditions. The form of modernity will have to vary between the two countries depending upon specific circumstances and social practices." Chatterjee proposes that to classify true modernity, we first need to determine the particular forms of modernity that are suitable in specific circumstances. It involves reasoning through rational methods to identify or invent the specific technologies of modernity that are appropriate for a specific purpose. Thus, the performance practices of contemporary India using indigenous forms represent a revaluation of traditional performing arts, which can be considered modern or performances with modernistic approaches. The question of modernity in theatre is dynamic and subject to different perceptions.

Contemporary theatre, which started in Bengal in 1795, was considered the beginning of modern Indian theatre, which is a new genre with the amalgamation of western and Indian culture. After that, Parsi theatre, a theatre with a combination of western technology and Indian themes and music, is another new genre. It is considered modern and had captured the hearts of Indians and inspired them. All the explorations in theatre, beginning in 1795 and continuing to the present, are new experiments. One therefore, needs to understand the changing nature of Indian theatre from the perspective of enlightenment or modernity. "

The theatre of India has changed remarkably in the past few centuries ever since it walked down the path of modernity. As mentioned in the preceding discussion, modernity in the Indian context took a step, back in time to unearth classical and folk expressions and incorporate them into theatrical performances. The movements of IPTA, initiatives of the government of India and some individual efforts have contributed immensely to this area. Post-1990s, we have seen a stark change in the consumption of art and culture, with the process of globalization and the opening of the market shaping the tastes, attributes, and, accordingly, the content. After 1990, new modernity in terms of new technologies in TV, cinema, online media, and OTT platforms transformed these media into offering more avenues for generating content for mass consumption. In all these, the theatre suffered a lot. Popular art engulfed traditional art with its classical and folk traditions.

The promotion of appreciation of art among the audience has become a necessary challenge in view of the availability of highly commercialized and photographically refined TV, cinema, and online content. How theatre would cope with the present globalized world and amalgamate with the different available media would decide the course of theatre, classical and folk tradition; thus, promoting art and the artistes in the real sense rather than the ritualized contents performed by the 'kleptomaniacs' as referred to by the playwright, Elkunchwar.

The question of modernity in theatre is dynamic and subject to different perceptions. But at present, it is at the mercy of new avenues of media and technological development and changing audience taste. This revaluation, in the context of the present era of having modernistic approaches yet taking forward the classical and folk traditions, would give theatre a meaningful engagement with the

audience and the artiste. But how it amalgamates and competes with the electronic and digital media would set the future course of the rich Indian theatre tradition.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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