When I decided to enroll myself for PhD, the first major problem in front of me was the topic on which I should work. Earlier discussions with my guide focused on this issue and we observed that although considerable work had been done on the history of theatre in terms of dramatic structure and staging methods as in Sanskrit drama and folk theatre and also about the contemporary theatre, no worthwhile study or research has been done to investigate and analyse the contribution of theatre during the freedom struggle in India. A number of books have been written and papers published on the role of other media like Press Literature etc. Cinema in the freedom struggle of India but it is hard to come across enough material evaluating the work of these dramatists and the other theatre practitioners who spent their lives educating people and bringing about a renaissance in society through the medium of theatre. The most important phase in the history of theatre was this period when theatre was used as an instrument to bring socio-political change in the country which in turn was one of the major strategies to get freedom from the British rule. During this period, theatre people found common cause with the freedom fighters and social reformers and worked for achieving not only political freedom but also freeing India from social evils. Theatre encouraged people more than any other media to fight for their rights, existence and freedom.

The present study envisage to analyze how India adapted itself to reflect the social aspirations of the time by inventing new modes of expression in terms of dramatic structure and staging techniques. Effort has also been taken in this study to understand how the dramatists during that time made use of the
available theatre traditions to convey their message besides how new trends emerged in International theatre and these modes of expression like realism inspired Indian theatre. It also examines the emergence of the theatre of direct action which was to convey the message of freedom to the common man. Therefore, the present research work entitled “Theatre and the Freedom Movement in India” has been conducted and compiled to examine how the inner potential of the theatre as a medium has been used as a catalyst to augment social and political changes for the complete liberation of the India and its society.

The time span beginning from the staging of the first modern play in Calcutta by Lefdeff in 1795 to the gaining of independence in 1947 is about 150 years. It also includes countless plays, playwrights, theatre groups and languages. Needless to say that it is not possible to include every thing in a study like this. So the present study envisages to take up only those very important and prominent persons, modes, events, productions, plays, play-wright, actors and directions.

Therefore, keeping in view all the above points, the present thesis has been divided into seven chapters. The outline and the brief description of the chapters is given below:

The Chapter One; “The Resurgence of Modern India and Theatre” Deals with the reformation that India was under going during the early nineteenth century and the evolution of theatre from a mere source of entertainment when it was first introduced by Herasim Lebedeff in 1795 to an instrument against the British when the first play of protest ‘Nil-Durpan’ was staged in 1872.

The Second Chapter; An Investigation of Various Trends of the existing Theatre during British rule. Analysis how the already existing theatre forms were used by the dramatists in nineteenth century to convey the contemporary message of socio and political change and how the dramatists reinterpreted classical Sanskrit drama for this purpose. Plays like Abhijnanashankutala,
Mrichchkatika and Mudra Rakshsa were reinterpreted to convey social and political themes. The later half of this chapter explores how the dramatists employed successfully the folk forms like Jatra, Bhaavai, Nautanki, Tamasha, etc. as these forms had the advantage of reaching the audience easily.

The Chapter Three; The Use and Influence of Folk and Classical Sanskrit Theatre Forms in Tackling Social and Political Problems focuses how the playwrights of the nineteenth century drew heavily on the form, structure and staging methods of the Sanaskrit and folk theatre traditions to write original works in various languages. The early theatre practitioners like Bhartendu Harishchandra, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Anna Saheb Kirloskar, Vishnu Das Bhave, etc. depended heavily on the dramatic structure and staging methods of the classical Sanskrit and Traditional folk theatre to reflect the social and political realities of their time. The chapter has been devoted to a detailed study to see their efforts in achieving the goal.

The Chapter Four; Commercial and Entertainment Theatre Groups, examines the role of commercial and entertainment theatre as an instrument to bring about social and political changes during freedom struggle. An evaluation of the work of the different existing commercial and entertainment theatre groups in Maharashtra, Bengal, Karnataka and other parts of the country towards this direction has been done, with a side by side analyzing of the artificiality of Parsi Commercial Theatre groups their over indulgence of commercial aspects in performance which come to restrict the range and scope of serious experiments. The work of those commercial groups which were active to bring social and political changes during freedom struggle inspite of being commercial theatre groups. Like Kirloskar Natak Mandli, Bal Gandharva Natak Mandli, Prithvi Raj Moving theatres, etc has also been analyzed. Work of these commercial theatre groups to propagate social and political problems and their awareness about political movement has been discussed.
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The Chapter Five: The Advent of Realism In Indian Theatre in Terms of Dramatic Structure and Staging Methods. Discussed how realism emerged in the western theatre and how the Indian dramatists of that time adapted and successfully utilized the realism as an instrument of expression to as to bring social and political changes as realism provided of analytical and critical abilities to tackle contemporary problem effectively. The first introduction of realism in twentieth century by Sisir Bhadhuri, Naresh Mitra, Ahindra Chowdhuri and Durga Das Bannerjee was in terms of modern realistic acting on the stage. Dissatisfaction with professional theatre was matched by Jay Shankar Prasad, Prem Chand, I.C.Nanda in the literary work. Their work has been scanned and evaluated from the realistic point of view. It has also been discussed that how realism was used effectively in tackling social and political problems by Indian playwrights and theatre practitioners. The introduction of one act plays by Upendra Ashk, Jay Shankar Prasad, etc and the use of realism in the new of staging methods have also been analyzed.

The Chapter Six; Theatre of Direct Action deals with the analysis of the time when freedom movement gained momentum. By and large the vast majority of educated middle class of the Hindi region come to be more directly involved during this time. The impact was such that those interested in theatre were obsessed with the idea of political propaganda and using drama as a powerful medium of self expression and social communication. In Hindi literature and the drama, social problems emerged as a subject of independent treatment. The political consciousness of that time showed a sign of maturity the general aspiration of freedom from foreign rule was a highlighted as the specific cause for social maladies. Political activity in the Hindi region became intense and involved more and more middle class people. They formed the class which took active interest in theatre and was deeply involved in politics as well. This chapter narrates the causes and consequences of birth of the theatre of direct action and analyses their work in terms of dramatic literature and staging methods.
The Chapter Seven; The Role and Impact of the Other Media focuses on how the other media like press and cinema used their inner potential as an instrument to bring social and political changes during freedom struggle in India.