Chapter - I

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Drama has been a very influential and powerful medium in Indian literature because of its audio-visual medium of expression. “Drama is a mimetic representation of life combining in itself the real and the fictional, art and reality and representing the events and characters within a dimension of space and time. It combines the qualities of narrative poetry with those of visual arts. It is a narrative made visible” (Supriya 1). Indian drama reached its apex and elevated its fame through various regional theatres such as Kannada theatre, Malayalam theatre, Gujarati theatre, Marathi theatre, Bengali theatre and Telugu theatre. Amidst all the regional theatres of India, Bengali theatre occupied an esteemed position because of its great contribution to the domain of Indian dramatic culture and tradition. It encircles almost all the thematic aspects but social and political outlook of the society appear in a more pronounced manner in the works of Bengali dramatists. The playwrights of Bengal from the initial stage of Bengali theatre dawn to the modern age envisage almost all the perspectives of society in their works. A large number of playwrights have come up and achieved national and international recognition through their dramatic writings and performances. Among them, the prominent figures are Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873), Dinabandhu Mitra (1829-1873), Girish Chandra Ghosh (1844-1912), Dwijendra Lal Roy (1863-1913), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Bijon Bhattacharya (1915-1978), Badal Sircar (1925-2011), Mohit Chattopadhyaya (1934-2012), Utpal Dutt (1929-1993), Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016) and Manoj Mitra (1938b) etc.

I

Perhaps more than any other single figure of the 20th century Bengali theatre, except possibly Rabindranath Tagore, Utpal Dutt (1929-1993) dominated the theatrical world of Bengal in 20th century and produced a revolution in dramatic and critical taste. Like Tagore in Bengali poem, Dutt is the primary modern dramatist of Bengal whose dramatic works aptly capture the contemporary issues. He is not only a playwright, actor, director and theatre activist but also a committed leftist and supporter of leftist
ideologies. “I am proud of my close association with the Communist Party, and the Communist-led river navigation workers of Metibruz, the tailors of Maheshtola and the automobile workers of Uttarpara who have been my teachers” (Dutt 38).

Utpal Dutt was born in Barishal (now in Bangladesh), on March 29, 1929, into a Hindu middle-class family. His father Girijaranjan Dutt was primarily a Professor in English Language and Literature at Bangabasi College of Calcutta University but he later joined administrative job under British Government. His mother Shailabala Roy was a house wife. They had eight children and Utpal Dutt was the fourth among them. Utpal Dutt’s early education began at St. Edmund’s School in Barishal and then he entered St. Xavier’s College of Kolkata. Utpal Dutt had a degree of graduation in English Literature from St. Xavier’s College in 1949. Dutt’s theatrical career started in St. Xavier’s College in Kolkata with the performance in selected scenes of Macbeth, Richard III and Romeo and Juliet of Shakespeare.

Oh, yes, theatre was a deadly serious thing at St. Xavier’s then. The Jesuit father who directed the plays created a sensation in 1943 with his production of Hamlet, with its striking sets, costumes and lighting; which was of course a college production, while I was still in school. There were small roles for us too in the college productions- boys, soldiers, etc. I was the second gravedigger in the 1943 hamlet. (Dutt 1)

In 1947, Utpal Dutt associated himself with Geofrey Kendal’s touring troupe and Theatre Company from England. He with Geofrey Kendal’s touring troupe produced the plays of Shakespeare in 1947. Dutt learnt the fundamentals and professional skills of theatre from Geoffrey Kendal’s Touring troupe.

I found the Kendals travelling throughout India and Pakistan in a mad rush, but with everything. They wouldn’t leave out anything. If you can’t carry everything with you on your tour, then you needn’t tour at all. That was the theory they went by and I consider that the correct theory. All that I learnt from the Kendals. (Dutt 6-7)

Utpal Dutt formed an amateur theatre group in 1949 which was later named Little Theatre Group (LTG) in 1950. In the beginning, the Little Theatre Group generally
put up the English plays but later it produced Bengali plays also. In 1950, Utpal Dutt joined the Communist Party's official cultural organization *Indian People's Theatre Association* (IPTA) but very soon he was disenchanted with the IPTA. According to Utpal Dutt, revolutionary theatre must preach revolution and overthrow the political power of radical bourgeois-feudal forces. As *Indian People's Theatre Association* was not producing such kind of revolutionary work, he detached himself from IPTA. “My association with the IPTA, the party’s official organization, was extremely brief-about eight months in 1950-51” (Dutt 38). Dutt returned to *Little Theatre Group* (LTG) and wrote his first complete play in 1958. One of his best plays during this period was *Angar (Coal)* (1959) which depicted the coal miners and the mine disaster. And then the play *Kallol (The Sound of Waves)* (1963) is on the naval mutiny of Mumbai in 1946. “Its guns booming away to proclaim the revolutionary elan of the revolt. Sardul Singh, the leader of the rebels, displays the elan in a no less fiery manner” (Raha 161).

Radio: We have won. Comrades, we have won.
Sardul: And you call this victory?
Radio: In this struggle, you have given us leadership. Accept our greetings, Sardul.
Sardul: What do you mean ‘have given’? I am still giving it. The time for greetings is not yet.
Radio: Do you mean the fight will continue?
Sardul: Yes. - No Surrender. (Translated by Kironmoy Raha) (Raha 161-162)

Both the above stated plays were greatly successful and consequently banned by the state Government for their explicit Leftist politics.

Dutt believed that the role of theatre should be politically conscious and the purpose should be the spreading of revolutionary message to the masses. In the year 1969, Dutt replaced the name of *Little Theatre Group* with *People’s Little Theatre* (PLT). During this time Utpal Dutt became one of the highly controversial figures as he used theatre as a political weapon. “Five of Dutt's best plays-Teener Talowar (The Tin Sword), Barricade, Surya-Shikar (Hunting the Sun), Maha-Bidroha (The Great Rebellion) and Duhswapner Nagarn (The Nightmare City) hail from this period of
severest opposition from the state” (Chatterjee 29). The first production of PLT is *Teener Talowar (The Tin Sword)* (1971) which is based on the Bengali theatre itself. The production was highly innovative and it demonstrated the growing tradition of Bengali theatrical writing. As the best plays of People’s Little Theatre’s productions were highly controversial at that time, Utpal Dutt was arrested and detained without trial.

Utpal Dutt played a pioneering role in the politicization of jatra. Jatra is the distinctive and traditional form of theatre in rural Bengal. It has a great popularity among large illiterate village audiences even today.

While he was making waves with his political theater in urban Kolkata, Dutt increasingly felt that he needed to reach an even bigger audience and began to consider other forms of theater. Disgruntled with what he called his ‘private revolutionary theater’ and alienated from India’s other leftist political groups because of his initial support for the Naxal movement, which he had hoped would generate a mass audience for his political theater, Dutt turned to the traditional performance form of Jatra for new structural devices and modes of communication. (Banerjee 226)

At the same time Dutt got inspired by the theatrical activity of famous Italian dramatist Dario Fo. Being a committed leftist, Dario Fo used theatre as a weapon of revolution and protest against the institutionalized and feudal power and politics. His trailblazing work is *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* which was translated by Utpal Dutt into Bengali with some modification and it was performed in 1980. Dutt played a vital role in the politicization of Jatra of Bengal. He used street plays and Jatra as a tool to make the masses politically and socially conscious and to make them realize as to how they are exploited and oppressed by the state machine. He has written and directed around twenty two Jatras and he has been successful in his endeavor to raise the people against the state oppression.

Utpal Dutt also got critical acclaim and reputation as a film actor and director in Kolkata as well as in Mumbai. Dutt had a successful film career and acted in several films in Mumbai and Kolkata. He had leading and supporting role in Satyajit Ray’s
Jana Aranya (The Middleman) and Agantuk (The Stranger); James Ivory’s Shakespearewallah and The Guru; Mrinal Sen’s Bhubbun Shome and Chorus. He has also directed few commercially successful Bengali films. He received National Award for Best Actor in Mrinal Sen’s Bhubbun Shome in 1970 and three times Film Fare Best Comedian Award. He is a recipient of Sangeet Natok Akademi Fellowship for lifetime contribution to theatre. This gigantic literary figure of post independent India died of a heart attack on 19 August 1993 in Kolkata.

II

Another doyen of Bengali literature is Mahasweta Devi who like Utpal Dutt believes “Writing is activism for me” (qtd in Sen 61) and the whole spectrum of her writing exhibits a concern for the downtrodden community.

The tradition of politically active creative literature, as embodied in the works of writers like Ngugi wa Thiong’o, James Baldwin, Ken Saro-Wiwa, is forwarded by Mahasweta Devi in India who traverses the world of fiction, history, journalism, socio-political activism with equal elan. (Gupta 29)

Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016), a prominent literary artist in Bengal, is in many ways fully integrated literary figure for whom writing, social activity, art, and public life came together over a career as a writer, novelist, socio-political columnist, playwright, political commentator, social activist and social critic. A powerful influence on Indian literature and the life of the marginalized community of India, Mahasweta Devi impacted the scene as only a few others have done so. She achieved greatness in almost every literary genre such as short story, novella, novel, fiction and her dramatized version of fictions. She is also widely known for her accomplishment in lifelong struggle and activism for the marginalized and oppressed community of India. Mahasweta Devi gloriously occupies formidable space and stature in the history of Bengali literature as well as in Indian literature. “Mahasweta Devi brings to one’s mind a rare combination of a literary genius and a political activist. For Devi, writing is synonymous with her activism. She has proved with her long career of activism and writing that the pen is indeed mightier than the sword” (Sen 61).
Mahasweta Devi was born in Dhaka (now in Bangladesh), on January 14, 1926, into a highly accomplished and culturally rich Hindu family. Her father Manish Ghatak was a noted Bengali poet and novelist and her mother Dharitri Devi was a writer and social activist of undivided India. Mahasweta Devi’s primary education began at Dhaka but after partition she migrated to West Bengal. She completed her schooling at Beltala Girl’s School in Kolkata in 1942. She took admission in Asutosh College of Calcutta University but very soon she left it and joined Visva Bharati University. She got admitted to B.A (Hons) in English in Visva Bharati University of Shantiniketan and completed it in 1946. After completing her graduation, she engaged herself with tutoring the marginalized students and in 1949 she got a Government job. Mahasweta Devi got her M.A. in English from Calcutta University in 1963. She has served as a teacher in English at Bijoygarh Jyotish Roy College and also served as a private tutor to the poor and marginalized students till 1982.

Mahasweta Devi never allied herself with any political party. Devi started her career as a writer under the pen name Sumitra Devi in Sachitra Bharat, a Bengali Weekly magazine. Jhansir Rani (The Queen of Jhansi), her debut work, got published in 1956. In 1947, she got married to Bijon Bhattacharya, a committed leftist, member of Communist Party of India (CPI) and prominent Bengali playwright. In 1962, she divorced her husband and concentrated on serious writing. In 1982, Mahasweta Devi joined as a reporter in a daily Bengali newspaper namely Jugantar and in 1986 she joined as a weekly columnist in Bartaman, a daily Bengali newspaper. There was a journal in Bengali named Bortika (The Lamp) which is dedicated to the cause of the marginalized and the oppressed class of the society such as landless laborers, peasants, tribals, rickshaw pullers and also other socially downtrodden people. Before 1980, Devi’s father Manish Ghatak was the editor of the journal and in 1980 she became the editor of Bortika. Her journal Bortika (The Lamp) provides a forum to the agricultural laborers, tribals, adivasis and peasants.

From 1976 onwards, Mahasweta has become more and more involved with the lives and struggles of the tribal and underprivileged communities settled in the border regions of the three neighboring states of West Bengal. Bihar and Orissa, especially the districts of Medinipur, Singhbhum and Mayurbhanj. (Dasan 78)
Mahasweta Devi engaged herself with so many grass root tribal organizations in her long career of activism and writing. In 1981, she founded *Palamu Bandhua Mukti Morcha* in Palamu district of Bihar. “I led a procession through the streets of Palamu, we went to the District Commissioner. The women led the procession, shouting slogans: ‘Bonded System Must End’, The Land Belongs to the Tiller, Not the Absentee Landlord’, and many others” (Devi 38). In West Bengal, there are two de-notified tribes i.e. the Lodhas of Medinipur district and the Kheria Sobor of Purulia district. In 1978, she set up *Lodha Organization* which started protest for the oppression against the Lodhas and also for their rights. In Purulia, she formed *Purulia Kheria Sobor Organization* with Gopiballabh Singh Deo.

These organizations are carrying on local developmental and income-generating work among some of the most deprived and isolated tribal groups in the districts of Medinipur and Purulia. Mahasweta does not seem to repose much faith in the panchayat system; she thinks that developmental work in the tribal areas should be entrusted to these grass roots organizations, the tribals’ own organizations. (Bhattacharya 1003)

Besides all these, Devi worked for many other tribals and downtrodden communities of India such as the tribals of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Telangana, Jharkhand etc. In 1986, she formed *Adim Jati Aikya Parishad (Tribal Unity Forum)* for the unity and fraternity of tribals community and the other downtrodden communities of India. Mahasweta Devi was influenced by the Naxalbari Movement of 1960s and 70s of Bengal. “I think the Naxalbari Movement, of course, moved all of us. Perhaps all my life I had been waiting for a people’s movement and this was it” (Devi 66).

The writings of Mahasweta Devi embody a harsh reality of Indian civilization. She herself works for the oppressed and tribal community and her writings also capture a kaleidoscopic picture of all the downtrodden communities of India. Her *Aranyer Adhikar (Rights of the Forest)* (1977) and *Chotti Munda O Tar Teer* (9182) deal with the plight of tribal and bonded laborers; and it exhibits the society of tribals from different dimensions. Her *Kavi Bandyoghoti Gayiner Jivan O Mrityu (The Life and Death of Poet Bandyoghoti Gayin)* (1966) depicts the social taboos and the plague of
caste hierarchy in fifteenth-century Bengal. Mahasweta Devi’s one of the most famous works Stanadayini presents a strange kind of slavery of Indian society. “Stanadayini is the story of Jasoda, a woman who keeps on bearing children in order to continue playing the exalted role of a wet nurse to a rich family, and finally dies of breast cancer, abandoned by her own and adoptive children” (Bhattacharya 1003). Mahasweta Devi’s most widely read and popular work Hazar Churashir Ma (Mother of 1084) (1986) shows the plight of a mother in the backdrop of the Naxalite Movement of Bengal.

In Hajar Churashir Ma (1986), developed around the agony of a dead naxalite activist's mother, whose upper class husband and family try to hush up the son's death at the hands of the police, the limitations of the narrative are manifested in the absence of this dialogism. The authorial voice overwhelms all other voices and lapses into raw sentiment. (Bhattacharya 1003)

Mahasweta Devi’s contribution to the Bengali literature as well as Indian literature is immense. Devi has written her works in her mother tongue i.e. Bengali Language. Her works are translated into several languages such as Hindi, Assamese, Telugu, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, and Gujarati. Mahasweta Devi’s works have been first introduced into the world literature through the English translation of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Major works of Mahasweta Devi are fiction but these works are also adapted for the stage.

Mahasweta Devi, in her long standing career of activism and writing, has received a plenty of prestigious national and international awards. In 1979, she got Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel Aryaner Adhikar (Rights of the Forest) and in 1986, she was conferred Padma Shri Award for social work. She was also awarded with the Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian award of the Government of India in 2006. In 2007, she was honored with the prestigious SAARC Literary Award and in 2011 with the Banga Bibhusahan, the highest civilian award of the Government of West Bengal. Her work was shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize in 2009. Beside all these, she was honored with several other prestigious awards. On 28 July 2016, this colossal figure of Indian literature departed from this world due to heart attack in Kolkata.
III

Manoj Mitra (1938b) is one of the most important, acclaimed and influential dramatists of the twentieth century Bengali theatre. Apart from being a theatre director and actor who made a considerable contribution to the field of film and television, his fame largely rests on his plays and theatre, which ushered in a new theatrical tradition full of technical as well as thematic innovations. His unique blend of satire, irony, farce, fantasy, allegory, comedy, and traditional belief can be traced in the works of different dramatists such as Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873), Dinabandhu Mitra (1829-1873), and Amritlal Basu (1853-1929). No other Bengali playwright except Pramathnath Bisi has used theatre to explore social and ethical themes so fiercely and deeply. Mitra’s plays are filled with stark, harsh reality, and grotesque characters, and dramatize the difficulty and necessity of spiritual belief and socialism in a world increasingly devoid of meaning and transcendence. Regarding the thematic concern of his plays and theatre, Manoj Mitra once admitted in an interview to noted theatre critic Samik Bandyopadhyay, “I have thought that I had to write about the present time, and that it was the theatre’s prime responsibility to enlighten people on all that was happening right now around them” (Mitra 263). A towering figure of post-Tagorian Bengali theatre, Manoj Mitra changed the direction of the Bengali stage from what people termed ‘the political theatre of realistic conventions,’ to a new kind of theatre that Mousumi Roy Chowdhury, the translator of Mitra’s work, called “The Theatre of Conscience” i.e. theatre more in the realm of ethics than of politics. “He plants his plays including, the allegorical ones, firmly in the soil of social reality. Structure and language wise they are strikingly new and yet beguilingly familiar” (Raha 184).

Manoj Mitra was born in Dhulihar village of Khulna (now in Bangladesh) on 22 December 1938. He belongs to a talukdar family; his grandfather was a big talukdar of undivided India. His father Ashok Kumar Mitra was a government employee and because of his father’s transferable job Mitra started his initial education at his home. His schooling began after the partition in Basirhat. Since his school days he had been attracted to the creative writing and theatricals. “I had started writing stories from a very young age. We had a house in Basirhat where I came to stay and started going to school. This village too had its theatricals in which I took part. Not that I was
particularly enamoured of theatre” (Mitra 246). In 1954, Manoj Mitra joined Scottish Churches College under the Calcutta University in B.A. (Hons) in Philosophy and he completed his graduation in 1958. Mitra did his Master in Arts in Philosophy from Calcutta University in 1960. After the completion of his M.A., he started research in Philosophy for doctorate but he could not complete it because of his fascination with theatre. He began to teach Philosophy in a college at Ranigunj and later he joined as a professor of theatre in Rabindra Bharati University and retired as a Sisirkumar Bhaduri Professor from Rabindra Bharati University.

During his college days, Manoj Mitra developed his passion for theatre and acting. In his college, he used to participate in acting performances. “Many of my friends here went on to become reputed actors. Rudra (Rudraprasad Sengupta) and I acted together in college plays. We also had Parthapratim acting with us. All of those who formed the group Gandharva were from Scottish. Many in Nandikar too were from there” (Mitra 246-247). While Mitra was pursuing his bachelor degree at Scottish Church College of Kolkata, he used to write stories and these stories got published and some of them got compiled to form the theatre group called Sundaram. When they were the students of Scottish Church College, Manoj Mitra with his college friend Parthapratim Chowdhury and others formed the theatre group Sundaram in 1957. Mitra headed the group Sundaram and he wrote and directed most of his plays for the group. Mrityur Chokhe Jal (Tears in the eyes of Death) is the debut play of Mitra, written in 1958 and premiered in 1959 under the direction of his friend Parthapratim at a competition organized by the Theatre Centre. The playwright said in an interview that:

if you study it, you will find it a very different kind of play, if not so much in content or setting, in its dialogue and other aspects at least, which were straight out of home, totally different from the notions of theatre current at the time. It had no conventional theatricality about it, either in text or in the production. The play was broadcast, and came first in the competition. (Mitra 248)

In 1965, he wrote Nilkanther Bish and made himself one of the best among the contemporary Bengali playwrights. In his long career as a playwright, Manoj Mitra has written over hundred short and full length plays and around forty scripts for radio and television; and he is still writing. Besides writing plays, Mitra has directed several
plays and acted in large number of performances. The plays of Manoj Mitra are distinctive and unique in respect of its unique characterization and the realistic and vivid depiction of society. “My protagonists are not successful men nor are they powerful people in society. They are very ordinary people, pathetic, lonely, unwanted by their family and society” (Mitra vii). His subsequent plays such as Chak Bhanga Modhu (Honey from a Broken Hive) (1972), Sajano Bagan (Bancharam’s Orchard) (1977), Rajdarshan (An Encounter with Royalty), Sobhajatra (Procession) (1991), Galpo Hekim Saheb (The Tale of Hekim Saheb) (1994), Chhayan Prasadth (The Shadow Palace) (1998) etc. maintain highly creative and innovative standards and get huge commercial success. Owing to his successful plays, Manoj Mitra emerged as one of the most influential figures among the contemporary Bengali playwrights. He was also the President of Paschimbangya Natya Akademi, Government of West Bengal.

In his long career, Manoj Mitra made a considerable contribution to the domain of Bengali commercial and art cinema. He acted in Bengali films under the direction of many famous directors like Satyajit Ray, Buddhadeb Dasgupta, Tapan Sinha, Tarun Majumdar, Basu Chatterjee, Shakti Samanta and Goutam Ghosh and so on. Mitra acted even in negative role in several Bengali commercial and art movies. His well-known films are Satru (1984), Kenaram Becharam (1986), Antardhan (1992), Wheel Chair (1994) etc.

Besides all these, Manoj Mitra has been writing different kinds of plays and he has also been acting in various Bengali commercial and art films. Because of his long dedication to literature, art, culture and movie, he has been honored with several prestigious awards. In 1985, he got Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for the Best Playwright and in 2005 he was honored with the Asiatic Society Gold Medal for the contribution to drama. He was the recipient of Banga Bibhusahan, the highest civilian award of the Government of West Bengal in 2013 and he was also conferred with the Honorary D Lit in 2013 from the Kalyani University of Kalyani, West Bengal. The playwright Manoj Mitra has been honored with several other governmental and non-governmental awards and honor.
IV

In the writings of Utpal Dutt, Mahesweta Devi and Manoj Mitra, society and politics play a pivotal role as they encapsulate every part of their writings. Society denotes a group of interacting peoples who share a common value, civilization, law, traditions and culture. Robert M. MacIver and Charles Hunt Page define that society “is a system of usages and procedures, of authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and divisions, of controls of human behavior and of liberties. This ever-changing, complex system we call society. It is the web of social relationships. And it is always changing” (5). Each individual is the fundamental constituent of a society. Every member of a society directly or obliquely partakes and involves in culture, politics, religion and consuetude. People need society for their existence, survival and accomplishment in this world.

In everyday language, the term society tends to be synonymous with ‘state’. One speaks of Norwegian society, British society, South African society and so on. First, every state (even the smallest ones) contains several local communities, which may for several purposes be seen as societies in their own right. Moreover, many states are composed of different ethnic groups who speak different languages, who have limited contact and who may have little in common, culturally speaking. (Eriksen 23)

Likewise, Indian society is composed of diverse race, ethnicity, caste, creed, religion and multiplicity in existence and faith. The composite culture and religious plurality is the ethos of India. In Indian society, caste, religion, culture, gender etc. have an irresistible influence on the procedure of socialization. There is an ample variation in dress styles, religious ceremonies, customs, spoken languages, food habits among the people of different castes and religions. In India, religion and culture play a major role in the society. People can recognize one person’s religion by his name.

There are several ceremonies which confirm membership in a religious group or recognize different stages in the life cycle. Think of all the ceremonies when a woman becomes pregnant, before the delivery, at the time of naming the child, for the feeding of rice, for the first
haircut, and so on. Food habits and dress styles vary according to religion too. Consider the differences in wedding ceremonies and funeral rites. (Abraham 80)

This is the ‘unity in diversity’ of India and the Indians are proud of the unique and composite culture of the nation. An ideal society is that society where all the people irrespective of their religions, caste, race, ethnicity is equal. But, in reality, it is very difficult to notice such sort of perfect and ideal society in the world. In the Western societies, there is always a conflict on religious ground between the protestant and the catholic, and commotions between the aristocrat and the lower classes are also discernible. The Indian society also comes under the same category as it is also not a perfect one; here one can find many social problems. Each and every society has some traditions and systems to level the people from different social groups on the basis of certain criteria such as income, hereditary status, education, occupation etc. Caste system is used in Indian society to categorize the people from high to low social status. According to these caste system and social norms of India, the hierarchical social order are rich and poor, landlords and landless people, elite class and lower class, upper caste and lower caste, rulers and ruled etc. As there were discrimination, oppression, suppression and marginalization on the basis of caste in Indian society, India has a long history of social reformation and reformers. Like all the other societies of the world, from the ancient times the process of social reformation has been going on in India too. “Social change refers to modifications of social structures and processes over time. In India, the old caste system based on the theory of pollution and purity has undergone a thorough transformation” (Abraham 246). There have been influential social reformers like Ram Mohan Roy, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Mother Teresa, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekananda and so on. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who campaigned against social discrimination across the country, condemned the caste system by saying:

The caste system is infested with the spirit of isolation and in fact it makes the isolation of one caste from another a matter of virtue. The class system it is true produces groups. But they are not akin to caste groups. It does not make isolation a virtue nor does it prohibit social intercourse. (qtd in Gauher 403)
On the Contrary, Politics is the activity through which people can formulate, safeguard and amend the rules and policies under which they live and exist. According to the Greek philosopher Aristotle, politics is a kind of activity through which human beings endeavor to develop and improve their lives, subsistence; and through politics they strive to create a good society for the better survival of human being in this world. Thus, politics is all about society and above all politics is a sort of social activity; politics and society cannot be separated. Without society there is no existence and meaning of politics.

When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life. And therefore, if the earlier forms of society are natural, so is the state, for it is the end of them, and the nature of a thing is its end. (Translated by Benjamin Jowett) (Aristotle 2)

Politics is the art of government, practice of authority and power, making decisions and distribution of resources. It works at every sphere of human existence. Politics is at the spirit of all sorts of social activities, personal and public activities, institutions and all kinds of human groups; even among the small group of friends and relatives it takes place.

Politics comprises all the activities of co-operation, negotiation and conflict, within and between societies, whereby people go about organizing the use, production or distribution of human, natural and other resources in the course of the production and reproduction of their biological and social life. These activities are nowhere isolated from other features of life in society, private or public. (Leftwich 103)

Thus, politics signifies the ways and norms through which societies or countries are governed and on the basis of these systems government makes laws and policies and makes the distribution of resources. The people who consciously endorse same
ideological belief come forward and form formal organization i.e. political party. These people who spent their entire time to make agreements and decisions are called politicians.

India is a federal democratic republic based on multi party system. As it is a democratic republic, here all the political parties should work for the inclusive development of people irrespective of caste, creed and religion. India has produced so many political and social intellectuals and thinkers in the path of her long and rich history such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and many more. Gandhi’s vision of India was based on the religious plurality and the democratic norms. On the other hand, Ambedkar defines democracy as, “democracy is a mode of associated living. The roots of Democracy are to be searched in social relationship, in terms of associated life between the people who form the society” (Jatava 77). After the independence, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indian National Congress dominated the state and national level politics and won several consecutive elections.

VI

It is extensively considered that theatre epitomizes the social and political spectrum of a nation or society on the stage through the performance. The height of vividness and lucidity of a dramatic performance are measured through the theatricality of a specific performance. Theatricality is an artistic, ingenious and erudite notion of theatre. Theatricality is an indispensable and potential trait of a theatre. It is the component of performance on the stage amalgamating a definite technique of dramatic representation and approach of observation of the audience. It has always been associated with the stage or the audience.

It is a mode of representation or a style of behavior characterized by histrionic actions, manners, and devices, and hence a practice; yet it is also an interpretative model for describing psychological identity, social ceremonies, communal festivities, and public spectacles, and hence a theoretical concept. It has even attained the status of both aesthetic and a philosophical system. Thus, to some people, it is that
which is quintessentially theatre, while to others, it is the theatre subsumed into the whole world. (Davis 1)

Performers are not the sole originator of theatricality; performers and the spectator’s interplay collectively form theatricality in the performance. Josette Feral also emphasized the essentiality of physical presence of both the performers and the spectators for the production of effective theatricality of a dramatic performance. On the contrary, Elizabeth Burns opines theatricality is a mode of perception and observation; and according to Joachim Fiebach theatricality is the mode of behavior and expression.

For Erika Fischer-Lichte, theatricality emerges when the decoding of a sign is partially incomplete, it is from this semiotic insufficiency that the sign is hermeneutically processed as a sign of a sign. She argues that when the semiotic function of restoring a sign as a simulacrum becomes dominant, we are then in the presence of theatricality. (Montelle 6)

Theatricality represents the theme of a performance to liven up the vibrant pictures in the mind of the spectators and leave an incredible influence on the psyche of the audience. Theatre should turn into a reality of its own through an effective theatricality in the performance, not replicate reality on stage. For the production of efficient theatricality, the presence of both the performers and the spectators are necessary, but it is not the sufficient requirement. The spectators should involve in the performance through some exclusive technique of partaking.

The intersection between the performer’s actions and the spectator’s reactions—which I see as the core of theatricality—is characterized by three interactive levels, called the sensory, artistic, and symbolic levels of theatrical communication. These levels can only be activated during the process of a theatrical event. It is the very “eventness” of all theatre, the interaction between performer and spectator, which facilitates theatricality. (Sauter 63)
The ciphered actions of an artist in performance are decided by the social and cultural norms, and the aesthetic criteria and yardsticks of that specific performance. There are ample traditions and conventions regarding the technique and method of performance i.e. how to perform in tragedy, drama, farce, comedy, one act play etc. These customs and traditions are variable from time to time and from region to region.

There are major styles (realism, minimalism, expressionism, etc.), and there are, last but not least, different types of theatrical expressions (such as opera and music theatre, spoken drama, ballet and dance, mime, and puppetry). Every one of these categories presupposes a set of aesthetic rules and norms, which the performer has to follow or, in exceptional cases, can consciously moderate. (Sauter 55)

Indian theatre also has the wide and astonishing range of theatricality. The periphery of modern Indian theatre and its theatricality encompass the diverse kinds of themes and techniques. “Theatricality can easily be marked in different states as ‘Jatra’ in Bengal, ‘Tamasha’ in Maharastra, ‘Bhavai’ in Gujrat, ‘Yakshgan’ in Karnataka and ‘Folk lore’ in Madhya Pradesh and ‘Notanki’ in Uttar Pradesh” (Sharma 40). More specifically, among the regional theatre, Bengali theatre has ushered a revolution in the field of most innovative and creative theatricality from 18th century onward.

VII

The present study strives to explore the reformatory and revolutionary zeal of three versatile and well established playwrights who have been discussed above namely Utpal Dutt, Mahasweta Devi and Manoj Mitra with a special emphasis on society and politics. It will also focus on the aspects of societal, political and theatrical elements in the theatre in Bengal while focusing on the works of these three playwrights. The texts will be critically scrutinized from various theoretical approaches such as cultural Studies, humanistic approach and other contemporary literary theories. The main concern of the thesis would be the thematic aspects of the aforementioned playwrights with special emphasis on the theatrical devices that make them distinctive and unique in the canon of Indian dramatic literature.
Although a number of researches have been done on various issues inherent in the plays of the proposed playwrights, there remain some crucial questions that need to be researched such as:

- What sort of societal conflicts do these playwrights depict in their plays?
- What kind of reformative zeal is present in these dramatists?
- How do these dramatists represent the politics of power in their plays?
- What sort of revolution is sought by these playwrights?
- Are they successful dramatists regarding these issues?
- How do these playwrights present the different shades of theatricality?

Modern Indian drama is enriched by the contribution of playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, Mahesh Dattani, Utpal Dutt, Mahasweta Devi and Manoj Mitra and so on. Many researches have been done on these playwrights. I have chosen three well-established and versatile playwrights namely Utpal Dutt, Mahasweta Devi and Manoj Mitra because according to me till date they have not been explored properly by the researchers to do justice to their works. After reading the available critical books and researches on these three prominent dramatists, it is felt that these available studies fall short to capture all the aspects of the whole spectrum of the contributions made by the playwrights to the changing socio-political circumstances in India and Bengal in particular. It is also felt that these available materials are not only found wanting in informational exposure, these observations also lack some aspects of crucial importance that create a rich argument for research. The research proposes to place the playwrights on the map of nation and theatre movement. It is aimed to locate and document the journey of revolution and reformation through theatre which has suffered with lack of adequate scholarly and intellectual attention.

**VIII**

The second chapter of the thesis, “Literature Review” discusses the various dimensions and thematic variations of dramatic literature of Bengal from its advent to till date. This chapter also provides thematic and technical development of Bengal theatre and Bengali dramatic literature in an argumentative manner. In order to understand reformatory and revolutionary zeal in the works of these playwrights, this chapter undertakes a literature survey which is not confined only to the theatres of
these three playwrights but gives a wider understanding of theatre as a social and political activity in the light of the Bengali theatre as a whole.

The third chapter, “Theatre, Theatricality and its Development in Bengal Theatre”, discusses about the technical developments and innovations of Bengal theatre from its origin to till date. This chapter incorporates all the technical aspects of Bengal theatre such as stage, costume, design, makeup etc. and how it eventually developed in the course of time.

The fourth chapter, which bears the title, “Dialectics of Ideology and its Reformation in Bengal Social Structure”, scrutinizes the detailed component of social reformation zeal of these three playwrights in their respective dramatic works. This chapter also showcases the conflicts between the people of different ideologies and its impact on the society; and these playwrights’ attempt to bring reformation through producing their dramatic literature.

“Politics of Power and Revolution for Change” is the title of the fifth chapter of the thesis which demonstrates the nasty tricks of the powerful classes over the marginal class to retain dominance over the common masses. This chapter also exhibits the foul politics of different factions of ruling class and the miserable conditions of the commoners. These specific issues have been analyzed in this particular chapter in the light of the dramatic works of these three playwrights and their fervor for revolution to change the prevailing power structures in the society.

Chapter sixth provides the conclusions reached on after the preceding chapters.
Works Cited


