Hashmi's Plays: A Perfect Blend of Marxian Ideology and Humanism

CHAPTER V

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**Machine: A Polyphonic Metaphor**

Like other agitprop street plays of *Janam*, *Machine* was born out of a topical labour issue that shook Delhi as well as the whole country in the last months of the 1970s. The 18 month long internal Emergency had crushed and muffled all kinds of dissenting voices from the civil society. Opposition leaders were either put in prison or gone underground. No trade union activities were allowed in factories and the existing trade unions were totally destroyed by the aggressive emergency regime. Safdar Hashmi’s *Janam* had performed a farcical skit titled *Kursi, Kursi, Kursi* (Chair, Chair, Chair) on Indira Gandhi’s refusal to accept the judicial verdict of Allahabad high court in June 1995 directing her to resign from the post of the Prime Minister.

However, during the Emergency *Janam* was totally inactive and unorganized as most members were on self-declared exile here and there. Though Safdar Hashmi was not overtly political in the early days of his theatre activities, his now mature political perspective and commitment along with the resentment over the atrocities of Emergency establishment in 1976 drawn him towards the Communist Party of India (Marxist), where he was an active member till his death in 1989 (Qamar 176). It can be said that from now on, in his theatre, a definite political goat was sought after. *Janam’s* plays started to
become more and more politically focused, even though they didn't perform in any party platforms except at trade union venues.

The eventual political defeat of the emergency regime in March 1977 brought back democratic activities in all fields, especially on trade union fronts. Intensive efforts were being made to rebuild trade union structures in factories. However the big industrialists and factories owners were still resistive as they were not ready to do away with the Emergency gifts of brutal suppression of labourers, on the spot firing on people suspected to be union activists, extension of working time and the complete immunity the owners enjoyed from government interference in labour issues.

Even after the new Janata Party Government came to power, the industrialists were not ready to part with the comfortable emergency legacies. The refusal of the new the new government to involve the police in labour issues, prompted the mill and factory owners to set up private armies in the label of security guards. These guards were provided not only with lathies but sophisticated guns also. Reports of labour thrashing and high handedness by these security guards became a regular occurrence in Delhi and other industrial towns also.

The once well-organized trade union movements were still in a state of disarray after the shocks of emergency brutalities. The suffocating political atmosphere had scatted all their cadres and destroyed the whole network. Now they were trying hard to retrieve their clout in the factories. For that they were badly in need of a cheap, effective means of communication to reach to the working
class. The trade union leaders were looking expectantly at activist artists for help. But the prohibitively expensive nature of proscenium productions compelled the activist artists to search for a new mass media that would be less inexpensive, mobile, portable and equally effective (Safdar, *Right* 160). Such an enquiry landed Safdar and his colleagues in experimentation with the street theatre. In the look out for such a cheap, flexible and effective theatre form, they were aiming at providing an effective agitation and propaganda media for the survival of the democratic culture in the society. So the activists of *Janam* felt for a theatre that is direct with no pretensions of class neutrality.

On his return to Delhi, after a short stint of teaching career in the English departments of Garwal and Jammu Universities, Safdar Hashmi attempted to re-organize *Janam* after a period of 18 month’s inactivity. As they could not afford and expect any financial assistance from the slowly convalescing trade unions, it became imperative for *Janam* to search for cheaper means for artistic expression of their political ideology. Having decided to try at the street theatre model, they didn’t have an imitable archetype in front of them. Hence the search for play texts suitable for street theatre began. When all efforts were in vain, *Janam* decided to write their own scripts for performance with a little diffidence.

Even though the activists had enough exposure with the proscenium productions, to develop a practical form and aesthetic for the political street theatre was a formidable challenge in front of them.
Their very conception of agitprop street theatre was very rudimentary. But the political and financial pressure motivated them to ponder upon. About the required contents in the play, they didn't have any doubt, as they thought that the theme should be pro-proletariat and against the exploitative industrial capitalism. They felt that to express this new content a new form was required. In this way the content followed the form in Janam's agitprop street theatre interventions since 1978.

Giving a mortal blow to the emergency establishment, with all enthusiasm, people had voted in a new government at the center. But within a short span of time this new political set up also proved to be anti-worker and anti-peasantry. With its escapist, partisan policy of laissez faire, the new government also declined to intervene in industrial disputes between the managements and the unions. Labourers' attempts to seek solutions to improve the dehumanizing working conditions in the factories went into deaf ears. Labour strikes were handled with iron fists by the security guards of the factory owners. In one of such incidents, the labourers of Herig India, a chemical factory in the outskirts of Delhi, were on strike when the defiant management repeatedly turned down their two simple requests.

Most of the labourers used to came to the factory for work from 15-20 kilometers away on their bicycles. They demanded a bicycle stand in the premises of the factory. In addition, they requested the management to set up a canteen in the factory complex so that they
could have a cup of tea and could heat up their stale bread at lunch. When both these two simple humanitarian demands were out rightly and rejected by the management, the labourers began a strike at the factory gates. Consequently, the security guards fired at the striking workers on simple provocation, killing 6 workers (Safdar, Right 159). This brutality was not at all different from the Emergency atrocities. This outrageous behaviour of the management put the labourers agitating all over Delhi. Joginder Sharma, the then Secretary of CPI (M)'s Delhi State unit, with a suggestion of writing a play, narrated this episode to Hashmi and his colleagues (Qamar 245). Safdar and his comrades' class-consciousness and their identification with the sufferings of the working class ignited their artistic brilliance and promptly they decided to dramatize the incident.

One more political occurrence accelerated the proposed project. The new Janata government, that came to power riding on the the wave of anger against emergency exigencies had also started taking anti labour measures. One such measure was the Janata Government's decision to reintroduce the new Industrial Relations Bill, in an attempt to clamping the intensifying political activities and industrial disturbances. This new bill was something that would affect the future of the whole trade union movements in the country. Hashmi wrote on the proposed Bill:

The Janata Government tried to introduce a new Industrial Relations Bill, similar to the one the Congress (I) Government had previously tried to introduce but had
been unable to because of the combined resistance of the people. Now a similar anti-people bill had been designed. The gist of it was that a lot of power was given to the local governments to summarily deal with the trade unions and giving them powers of preventive arrests. Many of the democratic rights of the workers were taken away. Consultive Structures were broken down and industrial talks obliterated. Labour Dispute Tribunals were removed. We tried to relate the new bill and the chemical factory incident. (Right 160)

*Janam*’s first full-fledged street play, *Machine*, was born out of these socio-political occurrence in the last month of 1978. The play was first performed on 19th November 1978, in Talkatora Stadium, Delhi, to an audience of 7,000 trade union delegates assembled to streamline the protests against the proposed Industrial Relations Bill. It was only after persistent requests from the activists of *Janam*; the union leaders gave permission to perform the play at the end of the union session.

The leaders could not see what a street play has to do with a serious trade union session. They refused even to make a formal announcement on the play. When the delegates stood up to leave the place after the day’s business, six people in black and blue robes rushed in to the arena and started making all the fuss. The end of the play enthralled the confused delegates. The incredible success of the premier performance of the play propelled the delegates to think about
its political potentialities and consequently an invitation was given to
the performers to perform the same play at the Boat Club, Delhi where
a trade union protest rally was planned next day. Hashmi describes
the incredible success of their first typical street play as:

The next day we performed at the Boat Club for about
1,60,000 workers. So you see, our street theatre began
very gloriously. Naturally, it was a source of strength to
us. A lot of people tape-recorded the play. We performed
on a 20 feet high rostrum. You can imagine that 1,60,000
people stretched for about half a kilometer. It was hard to
see, but there were lots of mikes. But it really charged the
audience. We were mobbed after the performance. Most of
the newspapers carried photographs of the play than of
the speeches, which was something the trade union
leaders did not like too much. A month after the rally we
started getting reports from all round the country that
people were performing Machine there. (Right 162)

Machine created a sensation all over India especially with the
urban factory workers. The workers easily identified the image of a
machine with all its implications in their life. The play begins like this:

(Audience on all four sides. Circular acting area in the
middle. Five actors, with quick rhythmic steps imitating
sounds of a machine, move into the center circle, get
together in the form of a big machine. The different parts of
the machine shakes, moves in particular ways and starts
emitting particular sounds. Having run for a while, the machine comes into a rhythmic halt) (118)

The machine is a metaphor of the whole industrial set up of India. It's a polyphonic metaphor that comprises different significance to different onlookers. To an ordinary audience, it is just an equipment, inanimate and insensitive. For a factoring labourer it is a metaphor of the exploitative industrial capitalism where his role is neglected. For a factory owner the machine is a metaphor of gold mine where from he can extract maximum profit with minimum expenditure.

The three major components of the machine: the labourer, the owner and the guard signifies the interpersonal relations in a capitalistic society. The labourer is always exploited, still with little stake in the whole system. The owner, with his almighty capital power squeezes the labourers to yield more profit. The third component, the guard, is a parasite between the labourer and the owner. His existence is symbolic of the application of rules and regulations to protect capital interests denying any democratic rights to the workers. His muscle power is the power of the establishment. The guard is policing the industry for its "smooth" run.

Taking clues from the classical Indian theatrical forms, Safdar Hashmi employs a Narrator for introduction, elaboration and presentation. Habib Tanvir's account of Machine as "an abstract, didactic play about the exploited working class"(Memorial Lectures 4) cannot be fully substantiate. Generally speaking, in no way it seems
to be a totally mystifying abstract play. Of course, Safdar Hashmi animates an inanimate object with the actors' body. But this simple featuring or tabloid effect does not reach to the scale and incomprehensibility of the modern avant-garde experimental theatre.

Safdar Hashmi by building a theatrical image of a machine in front of the audience, instantly and successfully familiarizes the context to his audience leaving no chance for any symbolic obscurity. The image of a machine is an inseparable part, especially in the life of the urban working class. Just a jerking sound or synecdochic presentation of a part of the machine would be enough for the working class to recognize and it relate it to their individual and collective experiences.

The didacticism that is attributed to this play cannot be accurate because, Safdar Hashmi rarely attempts to preach to his audience. He simply describes the inhuman exploitation at workplace, with all oppressions and helplessness. The Narrator, the mouthpiece of the author, provides links to different episodic actions. In brief, it can be assumed that this play is an illustration of the irreversible determination of the exploited working class to carry on with their struggles amidst all difficulties and against all odds.

The smooth running machine is suggestive of a cordial relationship between the means of production, i.e. the capital and the labour. But Safdar Hashmi's machine starts developing operational problems right from the beginning, indicating the existence of internal tensions. The narrator begins with explaining the different capabilities
of the machine, its origin and the need of a harmonious coexistence among different components. He focuses on the necessity of togetherness between the owner and the labourer, and if these components are not working together, it is the end of life's rhythm. Afterwards, one component disintegrates itself from the machine, and narrates his hardships. He is the labourer:

**Actor 1: (Gives a push to the Narrator, who loses his balance and falls down)** Together, together', what kind of togetherness is this? Who gives the support? How can this togetherness be achieved? I always get jest kicks! Whose kicks? Everyone's,... kicks from the house owner, kicks of the mill owner, the shop keeper, from the milkman and from the police! I have broken down with these tortures. I forget to tell you who the wretched am I? I'm the labourer, a part of the machine, a useful thing... but a wretched thing. I work at the machine, do the works of the master... and after that... nothing! If I demand my wages, then it's problematic.... If, I don't, again it's difficult. If I demand leave, then firing, if bonus is demanded. ...thrashing!! Together... together'... together.... Together.' (199)

This pretty lengthy monologue of the labourer vividly describes his pitiful condition both inside and outside the factory. It speaks a lot about his social inferiority, economic exploitation, physical oppression and financial insecurity. He is the most unprivileged and neglected
means of production.

Followed by the Labourer's speech, Hashmi presents the owner, whose position is sharply in contrast with that of the worker. The paradoxes that are abundant in his speech provide good times for laughter and entertainment. The working class audience laughs at his descriptions with suppressed fumes of anger. While the labourer is fed up with the call for togetherness and support, the factory owner emphasizes them for his own reasons. He comes out of the machine and delivers a lengthy sermon:

**Actor 2:** .... O my customers don't you know me?.... I'm the owner of this factory, who leads a very hard life. I invest money in business, bribe the ministers, instigate the police, buy the judges, intimidates the workers and runs this machine... then orders some bottles of whisky from London. Don't be angry with me, my souls,...my eyes,... my life. For you I will open a library, two hospitals and three cemeteries! And if I have your blessings, even I would ensure your burials too .. Just allow me to raise the prices, ...and contest the next election... then I will show you that heaven is made on the earth. I will ensure that children all sold by their fathers, and sisters by brothers. Now what shall I tell you? This is my life.. to sell everything... to earn the maximum.... This whole world is for selling. So we have to be together... together.... together. (120)
The security guard is the representative of the repressive state machinery that always, stands with capital and power. He describes himself:

**Actor 3:** Together... together.... If a bottle of liquor is given and a wink from the master... I won't think, If I kill a man or a pig. See this crooked moustache, this broad chest... I live on these. If I get a simple sign, I will make mince meat of you. I am called the security officer! Beware of me. I'm the servant of the owner, but for you, ... I'm the Lord. I'm a devil for the strikers. It's on my support this factory is running. If anyone dares to complain injustice, ...listen that's the end of him. Even if that's a child or woman, ... no mercy is there in my heart. My business is to keep everyone scared. If anyone frets, I'll give him kicks...! Together ... together.... (120-121)

While the owner parades before the audience in different incarnations of authority like the feudal lord, the politician etc., the narrator goes on commenting about the accumulation of wealth by a few. The poor are always subjugated. The prevailing tension at last brings about the disintegration of the machine. Finally the workers come out and declare collectively:

**Actor 1:** *(Comes off the machine)* This machine won't run. I've lost my patience. Ultimately I'm also a human being.

**Actor 4:** *(Comes out)* The issue is very simple, they can't make a cycle stand, ... bastards.
Actor 5: We came from 5-6 miles away.

Actor 4: And Rajsingh comes from 18 miles away. And they want to park the trucks in the canteen too. They cannot put up a simple stove there. The bread that we bring in the morning become stale by lunch time... just to heat it up and just for a cup of tea after lunch. (122)

In spite of all the intimidations by the owner and the security guard, the workers go for a strike, try to retaliate the physical assault by the guard. The owner calls for the military and gives gun to the security guard, who fires at the workers, killing all of them. The play concludes with a final invocation song by the narrator.

Narrator: Shoot down more and more, fire again and again..., Bring down the rain of bullets. But remember these flames can't be put down, This wild fire will spread wider and wider..., These drumbeats of revolution will keep growing. Who can stop this? Who can stop these workers? Who can? Who can? (124)

This 12-minute play is a fine “imaginative blend of philosophy, politics and poetry. The actual and the ideal, the real and the imagined, converge in the dramatic representation” (Qamar 245). Methodologically, Safdar Hashmi adapts the Brechtian episodic plot structure but with a unifying link, the Narrator. Hashmi doesn't resort to a direct call for political action, but describes the situations that
make strike inevitable. This theatrical intervention about a contemporary labour strike provides a moral reinforcement to the strikers encouraging them to stick to their cause. The final rounding up of the oppressors by the insurrected labourers, suggests the ultimate victory of the former.

Structurally, the play is episodic in nature with long introductory monologues by each of the components of the machine. The sentences are short, simple, and direct with end-rhymes. This rhyme scheme gives the monologues a poetic touch and force.

Initially this play presents the socio-economic conditions of the various means of production, then compare and contrast them, finally to emphasize that it is the proletariat who are the most discriminated lot. Safdar politically tries to attach the exploited lot with democratic organizations for a better, broader and unified assault on exploitative capitalism. Inflation, suppression, inhuman working conditions, lack of basic amenities in the factories and prolonged working hours are the basic thematic concerns of Machine.

**From the Village to the City: Omnipresence of Exploitation.**

What a messy mess is this!
That the lock is in the key;
And the house is in the room.
The stable is in the cow; and,
The mouth is in the teeth.
The plate is in the meal;
And the head is over the cap.
And the goggles behind the eyes!

(Safdar, Poems 18)

Safdar Hashmi wrote these lines, quoted above, mainly for children. It depicts a word of topsy-turvy. Everything is turned upside down. The reality is distorted and the normal is made abnormal. Similarly, in From the Village to the City (1978), Safdar Hashmi presents a world where the toilers are trampled upon by the lazy; the workers are ignored by the masters; and the studious sidelined by the influential stupidest. The earlier play of Janam, Machine, was set in an urban industrial background, and intended for the urban industrial workers. So in appeal and scope it was limited to a certain section of the society, i.e., the industrial labourers.

However, in From the Village to the City, Safdar erases the city-village boundary thereby giving the theme and setting a pan-Indian appeal. The saga of suffering is extended from the urban industrial labourers to the rural impoverished peasantry and to the unemployed educated youth. This thematic progress from the first play to the second street play is reflected in methods too. While the previous one was comparatively abstract in structure and form, From the Village to the City moves closer towards a well-made play in its concrete and direct method.

This 20-minute play is divided into three short scenes: village where a peasant is grabbed off his small land, the site of a labour strike where the labourers are brutally suppressed by the police, and a factory premises where different interests are expressed and
counter-argued. By this theatrical fusion of apparently dissimilar city and rural life, the playwright wanted to drive home the political philosophy that exploitation of the proletariat is universal irrespective of feudalism or industrial capitalism.

The migration of the uprooted peasant Kalua, the exhaustively exploited industrial Labourer in strike, and citywards movement of the educated unemployed Youth represent the progression of a society from an agriculture based rural life to an industry based urban life. The storyline of the play is extended to the service sector also. Kalua is more a representative of the past; the labourer embodies the present situation; while the educated unemployed youth signifies a grim future that awaits the next generations.

In *From the Village to the City* the theatrical devices of demonstration and narration are combined through the common link, the Narrator. The introductory song vividly encapsulates the biting realities of injustice, exploitation and suppression of the poor. The refrain_

How can you close your eyes at these?
How can these evils be crushed?
How can these evils be crushed? (125)

_is intended to provoke the audience to shed their criminal passivity at the injustices and exploitation and to go for political agitation. The Narrator is the mouthpiece of the author who at times dissociates himself from the action as well as intervenes the action for more clarification, if required. The use of Narrator compensates the lack of
stage properties to indicate the shifting of scenes and passing of time. This method provides more clarity to the action in street theatre. Another element, the songs, helps the street theatre activists to summarise the political issues in limited words, when a street performance cannot be prolonged for more than half an hour.

Thematically, *From the Village to the City* is an indepth theatrical analysis of the economic reasons and social consequences of rural impoverishment due to rapid industrialization that totally neglected the agriculture based rural life. The remains of subjugating feudalism capitalizes on the penury of rural peasantry and grabs their small holdings driving the peasant away from his familiar surroundings. This uprooted peasant ultimately migrates to the city. The fate of the peasantry is presented in the form of a soliloquy. Kalua, the protagonist, reflects on his condition:

**Farmer(Kalua):** It’s draught; if it doesn’t rain,
If it does, the whole village is in flood.
Now, do your farming;
Sow your seeds.
Here the spring is hostile;
And the autumn, your foe. (134)

The hostility of nature as well as the feudal appropriation of the peasant’s smallholdings forces him to seek his fortunes in the industrialized cities. But things always look greener on the other side. He realizes soon that the intrinsic world of exploitation and suffering of the proletariat is same everywhere in spite of the external glory of
the cities. Amidst a worker’s protest site, Kalua meets his urban counterpart, the Mazdoor (Labourer) who is beaten up thoroughly by the police for attempting to strike. He narrates his condition to Kalua:

**Mazdoor:** ....My dear, none understands the other.

We do this slavery right from the morning,
Completed three shifts production in one shift,
Still there are grumbling. The manager
Says, 'If you want to do the job, do it
Properly, otherwise go to hell'. They
Pay only for 8 hours, but make us work
For 10 hours. You can't even cry being hungry...
They give 200 rupees after getting signature for Rs.300.

(133-34)

By the amalgamation of these two different stories of suffering and exploitation, Safdar Hashmi politically problematizes the phenomena of urban migration, the feudal appropriation of peasants’ holdings and the exploitation of industrial workers. Through this play Safdar intends a theatrical intervention into the land reform and industrial policies of the government. The low-paid, over exhausted industrial labourers are equated the starving peasants. When it moves from the villages to the city, only the designation of the exploited and the exploiter get changed. If it is the landlord in the village, in the city the factory owner heads the reign of exploitation with the support of the police.

Safdar Hashmi used theatre as a medium of communication, to propagate his political ideology by depicting the rampant exploitation...
of the working class. In *From the Village to the City*, he unearths the untold facts of peasant impoverishment that leads to migration to the cities. The appropriation of small tenants' holdings by the feudal lords is a contemporary reality in India where meaningful and thorough land reforms has not been implemented yet. So this play is a dramatization of contemporary reality. This is "a realistic play with well-defined characters and divided scenes" (Safdar *Right* 163), where Safdar is more direct in his political pronouncements.

*From the Village to the City* is a political play in the sense that it raises political questions and demands peasants' rights on agricultural land, labour rights in the factories, and the need to streamline higher education by vocationalising it. In addition to these, Safdar unveils the real world of impoverished rural peasantry, exploitation of the industrial labourers and the sufferings of the unemployed educated youth.

*From the Village to the City* is a perfect example of straight intentional theatre where a crusade against exploitation and injustice is sought after. The dramatic tension is generated between different class interests expressed by the representatives of different class. Conflicts between the proletariat and the capitalists; between the peasants and the feudal lords; and between the unemployed educated youth and the contemporary educational system are depicted here vividly. During the course of dramatic action different characters put forth their demands that were the central issues raised in the play.

**Factory Owner:** Those who demand bonus...
Assistant: ... are enemies of the country.

Kalua: Those who sow...

All (Except the Factory Owner and Assistant): ... will reap.

Owner: Those who demand land...

Assistant: ... are the enemies of the country.

Student: Education should be...

All (Except the Factory Owner and Assistant): ... vocationalized.

Owner: All the students...

Assistant: ... keep away from politics. (138)

Safdar Hashmi, with this dialogue quoted above, hits at the de-politicization efforts by the establishment to contain the student struggles, as well as the complacency of the lower middle class government servants in this short play. According to Safdar the criminal apathy and self-satisfied nature of the lower grade salaried class, has to be demolished for intensifying the class struggle. The narrator invites the Babu (The Clerk), who speaks highly about the colourful and easygoing urban life, to a village to show him the reality. By rational arguments, the narrator politicises him.

Hashmi always believed that it is the sectarian tendencies among the proletariat that always pose great threat in the class struggle (Right 71). By educating the exploited classes, the author intents to build up a mass resistance against exploitation and injustices of all sorts. The plot of this play suggests a successful
From the Village to the City is presented in three episodic scenes where the common links between the scenes are the Narrator as well as the peasant, Kalua. The scenes shift from city to village and from village to city again. In the opening scene, the clerk questions the Narrator when the former signs about the universal and poverty of the people around him. The clerk comments that, “all these are the foolishness of the agitators...... and what a pleasant sights are these”(126-127). In order to shake his complacency and ignorance about what is going on around him, the Narrator leads him to a village. In this second episode, Kalua, the peasant is shown reflecting on his misfortunes. His crop is lost in the hostile climate, and his lone bull is dead. He is with no money and seed for the second sowing. Then Mahajan, the moneylender and Chaudhari, the landlord arrive there. Kalua expresses his inability to settle financial commitment to Mahajan. Mahajan and Chaudhari tell Kalua about the futility of sticking to his barren land and persuade him to sell it to Chaudhari. When Kalua rejects the proposal, he is threatened of evacuation from both his farm and house. In spite of Kalua’s protests, the landlord appropriates the land. Kalua could only lament, “But what about me? Where shall I go? Where shall I stay? My land, ... my farm....”(132)

Kalua migrates to the city, only to see that the labourers are brutally suppressed by the police. The Mazdoor who had just been beaten up by the police, tells Kalua the stories of his exploitation in the factory. In another scene a youth is seen expressing his anger over
unemployment and nepotism. The third scene is set in a place where the various interests of the peasant, the labourer, the owner and the unemployed youth are in clash with one another. The owner lays down his own argument. Finally, the peasant (now an industrial labourer), the Mazdoor and the Youth unite together in the fight against exploitation and injustice.

A structural map, given below, would be helpful in illustrating the interpersonal relationships of the characters and the final march of the exploited to the trade unions for a more strong and unified protest movement.

From the Village To the City To Next Generation

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<tr>
<th>From the Village</th>
<th>To the City</th>
<th>To Next Generation</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Peasant</td>
<td>The Mazdoor</td>
<td>The Youth</td>
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<td>(The exploited)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Landlessness</td>
<td>low-payment</td>
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<td>(Pessimism)</td>
<td>(Pessimism)</td>
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The Peasant + The Labourer + The Youth

(Optimism)

United Struggle Against

- Mahajan Chaudhary (Extorter) (Exploiter)
- The Police (Suppressor) (Exploiter)
- The Academy (Meaninglessness) (Nepotism)
- The Chairman (Exploiter)

Fig.: Dramatic Structure of From the Village to the City.

From the Village to the City is a direct political statement on the need to build up a united front of struggle against exploitation and
oppression. The playwright intends that only a collective mobilization could tame the exploiters. In this process the author exposes the hypocrisies of the feudal landlords with their frequent references to spirituality, and the factory owner with his frequent pseudo-patriotic statements.

When the society moves from feudalism to capitalism, no qualitative changes is seen in the condition of the proletariat, it rather exposes the inherent anti-worker policies that underlie in feudalism and capitalism. The feudal village as well as the industrial town offers no comfort to the working class. The landless farmer, the exploited labourer and the unemployed youth are the realities of contemporary India, where a fresh struggle has to be fought united.

Street theatre, with its lack of stage properties and distinctive costumes has to indicate different scenes and characters through cunning manipulations available things, of collective postures, simple and accurate indications. In From the Village to the City, the characters are distinguished clearly with the different styles in the use of a common shawl. The farmer Kalua is shown wearing a turban carelessly with a shawl; the worker just keeps his shawl carelessly round his neck; the landlord and the owner is indicated by a carefully folded shawl put over their shoulders, and the policeman imposes his identify by binding the shawl tightly round his head. This one of the methods of characterization, which is frequently employed in street theatre.

Similarly, distinctive characterization is achieved by some linguistic manipulations also. Each character has a distinctive
register, tone and accent. Kalua, the farmer, with his penury and illiteracy speaks in a colloquial, prayer-like, reflective and inhibitive tone. His words evoke sympathy and describe his helplessness at the injustices. His illiteracy and ignorance does not give him even the thought of protest. Kalua’s urban counterparts, the labourer is less illiterate. He speaks in a low tone with a suffocative anger and utter helplessness at the exploitation. He knows that he is being exploited and who is exploiting him. But he is forced to stick to his job, as there is no other way of life in front of him. In contrast to this, the owner and the landlord speak in a literacy language with an overwhelmingly aggressive and commanding tone. They are imperative in their speech. Deceptive, cunning and evading is their language. They try to divert the issues through trivializations and some unfit quotations from some poems. The unemployed educated youth is an angry young man whose language is full of inflammatory and accusative references. He speaks straight and in a provocative manner.

The clerk, who is the representative of the inferior bureaucracy, has his own style of language. His words are low pitched, submissive and scared. He is reluctant to take the first step in agitation but only follows the others far behind the processions. The assistant never has his individuality in language also. He simply repeats his master’s words at times. The Narrator’s language is goal oriented. He describes, points and explains the events in a persuasive, rational language.

From the Village to the City is an example of investigative theatre where the causes behind urban migration, industrial
exploitation and unemployment are probed. This is an example of political theatre where the feudal economic exploitation and extortion of the peasantry is interrogated, linking it to the scene of exploitation in urban industrial system. Kalua's journey from his village to the city is a symbolic one. It suggests the growing industrialization at the cost of agriculture sector. Ideologically his movement from his village to the city is a journey from ignorance to self-knowledge when he joins the trade unions in protests against the injustices and exploitation.

The extensive use of choric song and drumbeats are another characteristics of this play. The songs are composed of simple but effective phrases with rhyming lines. For example, the narrator in a short, simple, but effective song describes the condition of Kalua, after his ejection from his village:

Grabbed is his land, everything is gone,
Gone is the only support to life.
In vain was the sympathy of his palls,
As his ruin is brought by all. (132)

Songs are employed in this play to introduce a scene, to explain a situation, to describe a predicament and to incite the audience into agitation politics. In comparison to the first play of Janam, Machine, an active involvement of the audience is ensured in From the Village to the City. Characters emerging from the audience as well as disappearing in the audience after their roles help to achieve this. In other words, the audience is given the impression that the actors were
not separated from them but a part of them. The Narrator often addresses the audience directly as if in a political speech:

**Narrator:** *(To the audience)* This is the story of every family. Unemployment, inflation, starvation, after that arbitrary wage cut down, compulsory deposits, non-payment of bonus. The union office is filled with complaints. There is not a single labourer who is not harassed by the boss. Regarding bonus, right from the owner to the labour commissioner, they speak in the same language... 'Discussions are going on, wait a little while more,... same solution will be found.' (135)

The methodological as well as thematic analysis of *From the Village to City* reveals that it is an example of a very effective and direct political street theatre. The simple, effective and rhyming language; the relevant songs, the timely intervention of the Narrator, etc., make the episodic scenes a sequential a part of a larger dramatic structure. Here, Safdar Hashmi touches upon various topical issues like unemployment, inflation, wage cuts along with the two major themes: the feudal extortion and appropriation of peasants’ land; and the inhuman exploitation of industrial labourers.

**The King's Drum: Demolishing The Bastions of Power**

Irrespective of generic classifications, artistic productions ultimately reveal the artist's worldview. His ideological affiliations and theoretical obsessions will find their places in his art, albeit unconsciously or unintentionally. A committed artist claims no
political neutrality as he has a declared objective in his articulations of socio-political issues. Committed literature and art cannot be confined into any specific formalistic distinctions - it is distinguished by a greater realism and by the author's attitude to life.

Commitment in literature and art is an engaged view of writing where the author takes, mainly, contemporary socio-political issues for rigorous analysis and a purposeful presentation. To achieve this the author has to have a clear political perspective that can be achieved only through regular, continuous engagement with the day-to-day socio-political developments that affect people around him. Such a committed artist has to indulge in these affairs to absorb the inner dimensions and, simultaneously he as to detach himself artistically. This artistic detachment and political commitment gives him a perspective that would be expressed for the benefit of his fellowmen.

So a committed artist is giving back to his people what he got from his close engagement with them. On this reciprocity of artist and his society, Max Adreth emphasizes:

There is a reciprocal and fruitful exchange between this creative activity and his life as a man of action. The latter provides him with rich materials for his art; as he mixed with people, he shares their difficulties and learns about their feelings. In return his words can help his fellowmen to understand themselves. (449)
Safdar Hashmi’s ideological perspectives and political commitment provided him greater insights into the contemporary socio-political issues, enabling him to decode these for providing a better understand of the masses. His theatre was not mainly for the academically enlightened, but for the deprived sections of the society whose ignorance fails them even to understand clearly understand that they are being exploited in almost all fronts. For this Safdar’s theatre had to be less philosophical and melodramatic but more clear and direct. He couldn’t sugarcoat the bitter pills as this sophistication would fail him to his target. He had to be directly political. And he was. He couldn’t and didn’t hide his politics from his theatre as he had the same view as his collaborator and mentor G.P. Deshpande said:

And let there be no mistaking this. There is no such a thing as politics of theatre outside theatre. Politics of theatre has to be *within* the theatre. Only then does theatre become political theatre....It is not as though you become political when you take a political slogan and dramatize it. This is in fact not political at all, what is political is when the form itself undergoes a change because of certain political understanding and position.

(71)

Safdar Hashmi’s political understanding prompted him to take theatre to the people like Lalu Ram (*Right 16*), a textile worker who had never been to theatre before. The theatre went to him instead.
This descending form the alienating proscenium theatre to the absorbing street theatre defined Safdar's politics. Safdar always rejected the frequent criticism that political theatre can't be profound in its appeal and aesthetic in performance. According to him all theatres can't be adjudged with the same yardstick. Street theatre has to be evolved and appreciated in accordance with their topicality of the events described and with a different aesthetic standards (Right 14).

The King's Drum (1979) dramatizes the contemporary social reality of India with a widespread unemployment among the educated youth in the 1970s. Even now the problem raised in the play remains largely unresolved. There were about 30 million registered unemployed youth in India, according to the then government estimate (Right 167). Janam had performed a short play Teen Crore (Three Crores) on this contemporary issue. The play, The King's Drum, is an elaboration of this previous play.

As usual in his theatre, Safdar presents the problem theatrically with scientific analysis to dig out the root cause of the malice. He rejects the familiar notion that unemployment is a natural result of overpopulation, as no elite and influential youth faces this problem. On the contrary, the underprivileged are the lone sufferers of every policy drawbacks of our country. Safdar felt that it was necessary to expose the meanings and the internal mechanisms of this socio-cultural phenomenon. Rameshwar Dayal, the protagonist of the play, is just a specimen for the dramatist for a microscopic enquiry into the problem. Through Rameshwar Safdar puts the society at trial. With a
clinical accuracy the author digs deep into the reasons behind the protagonist's predicament and finally exposes the whole elite-centered political system in front of the public for their better and clear perception.

The actions of the play revolves around Rameshwar Dayal, an educated unemployed youth from a poor family. His bitter experiences in a society where everything is appropriated and controlled by the wealthy and the influential constituted the major theme of the play. Rameshwar's unpleasant trysts with different centers of power proved dramatic tensions, and push the action forward. The protagonist's interactions with the other main characters expose the whole contemporary socio-political set ups that are thoroughly corrupt and shamelessly nepotic.

In the corridors of power and influence Rameshwar is a permanent outsider who is not left with even a chance to express his anger at injustices and favouritism. During the course of dramatic action, the audience identify themselves with the protagonist who is a representative of the educated unemployed Indian youth. The rhetorical questions raised by the Narrator have tremendous impact on the audience so as to prompt them for political agitation against corruption and injustice.

The King's Drum starts with a demon dance and a demon song. The demons symbolises the elite and the influential. They sing of their aggressive clouts in all spheres of the society and they dare the general public to breach their fortresses of power and influence. Their
The demons are symbolic of the illegal accumulation and appropriation of wealth, the education system, the agriculture, the judiciary, the legislature, the technology and so on. The unholy alliance of these usurpers had made it difficult for the common man to reach to the establishment. This monopolization of industries, agriculture and other public institutions is a contemporary Indian reality. In the face of these the unprivileged like Rameshwar Dayal is totally helpless. The deprived class is not given their deserving space and opportunity in the public spheres.

This is one of the very few plays where Safdar makes use of masks a theatre prop. The masks suggest hypocrisy and the absence of ordinary human emotions and sympathy. The elitist appropriation
of all social spheres and services denies the commons man's sons entry in all most all domains of the society. Politically, through this play Safdar asks the neglected youth to demolish the seemingly impregnable fortresses of power and influence thorough political agitation and campaign.

Rameshwar Dayal's all attempts to break into the formidable bastions of power and wealth is severely retaliated by the influential and the wealthy. Here the playwright introduces the unfortunate educated unemployed poor youth.

**Rameshwar:** I am Rameshwar Dayal.

**Narrator:** An unfortunate unemployed. Son of a poor man, the only support to his parents.

**Rameshwar:** I went to school, attended college and studied day and night...

**Narrator:** Beating the dust of the streets;
Knocking at the doors;
Writing application;
Making requests. (141)

In this play too, Safdar Hashmi employs the tradition of the classical *Sutradar* (Narrator) to introduce and explain the main characters and situations. The Narrator links together the disconnected parts of dramatic action. After presenting Rameshwar, the narrator leads the audience some years backwards. During the subsequent flashbacks the biography of Rameshwar Dayal is dramatized.

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Even though the major theme of the play is the growing unemployment phenomenon in India, largely, this play is a sharp critique of all most all Indian public institutions. The audience is firstly led to a primary school where the preliminaries of subjugation and mental enslavements begin. Instead of kindling children's inquisitive thirst and sense of social justice they are being taught to be submissive and silent at instances of injustices. Safdar parodies the National Anthem of India for this farcical presentation. The children are told at schools to:

Don't speak the truth..., keep quiet..., keep quiet.
My lad, don't speak the truth, keep quiet,
Keep quiet..., bear it...bear it...bear it.
Come on...beat the king's drum. (142)

These early childhood instructions to be quiet and to bear every injustice is given to maintain the status quo in the society and to extinguish the flames of anger right form the beginning. By the presentation of this scene at school, Safdar Hashmi suggests that the ideological state apparatus like the formal educational system always try to maintain and keep the existing class relations and the existing class hegemony. Formal education here becomes a method of propagating the prevailing dominant ideology in the society.

In the second flash back during the play, Rameshwar Dayal is seen in a college where the irrelevancy of the subjects taught is more conspicuous. The higher education system, where it is expected to teach life-skills for an individual, is imparting just bookish
information. The repetitive exercises in memorization leaves no scope for authentic analytical knowledge or creative inquiry. In the college, the protagonist is taught science, politics, history, literature and philosophy without connecting them to the children’s familiar circumstances. Here the hero of the play begins to think properly and, in a way, subversively and that transformation of the mind makes him a questioning angry young man later on.

**Rameshwar:** What would be the use of these things that are being taught here? I don’t know. But I would like to know how some students, without attending classes, and without studying anything get passed. And I would like to know why father, even after working overtime, is not able to pay my fees in time. (144)

His attempts to interrogating injustices and irregularities put the authorities on back foot. Instead of giving him any satisfactory reply they accuse him of politicizing the college campus. The corrupt authorities attack him in unison:

**Librarian:** Your mind is infested.

**Principal:** You have fallen into the trap of the politicians.

**Dean:** This is a seat of learning, not a debating table.

**Head:** You are trying to tie this temple of learning in the stable of politics. (146)

The politicization of the college and university campuses has always given nightmares to corrupt authorities and irregular practitioners in the establishment. The clipping of student and youth
energy in the bud, by trying to keep them off politics, is always practiced by the organs of the establishment. Through the mentioning of this accusation of politicization by the authorities, Safdar indirectly suggests that it is through a thorough politicization of all walks of life the injustices in society can be rightly met with. Safdar was thoroughly political in his works and life. He, through his political theatre, says that people have to be rightly and thoroughly political in all socio-economic engagements in their lives.

Rameshwar Dayal's dreams bloom again after he becomes a graduate. But those were also short-lived ones. The frequent responses of, “no vacancy” (148), and “get out of here” (153) leaves him with a broken spirit and an isolated youth. The play ends with a mock-epic style verse that makes fun of India's tall claims:

India is the star of the world,
And the favourite of foreign aids!
Of all places, India is the best, and
All of us are the bubbles in this beautiful garden! (154)

The King's Drum is a theatrical trial of our contemporary society where the shattered dreams of the educated unemployed youth lead them to the wilderness of pessimism and socio-political hibernation. Safdar Hashmi ironically and comically treats the tall claims of India as a great nation while 30 million unemployed youth wander along the streets. The absurdities and futilities of bookish higher education and the hypocrisies of the elitist-driven democracy is lair bare in this play, exposing the class prejudices of the contemporary plutocratic political
establishment. Education is deemed to be a liberating force, or an agency of empowerment and a guarantor of decent life. But in contemporary India, where every thing is hijacked by the elite, it becomes a tormenting burden to the unprivileged who ultimately break down psychologically and socially.

Unlike Safdar's other plays, The King's Drum is open ended. The author does not attempt at achieving a definite conclusion, but just portrays the life of an educated unemployed poor youth who is a scapegoat in this class driven society. In that sense this plays is an effort to raise the consciousness of the audience against the prevailing injustices and irregularities in our society. Like Rameshwar, many young men have been turned into "a heap of broken dreams" (154). Safdar Hashmi realistically dramatizes the predicament of an educated unemployed Indian youth, prompting the audience to reflect on the root causes of the youth's fall. The repeatedly asked question, "Who is responsible for this?" (141-154) leaves powerful political ramifications.

The dramatist employs the methods of subversion, irony and flashbacks in this agitprop performance piece. The helplessness of the Rameshwar Dayal is contrasted with the aggressive demons. The former represents the unprivileged strata of the society, while the latter represent the cunning consolidation of all wealth and power by a few. The protagonist's recurrent interrogations of the biased authorities have subversive capability that has to be translated to political agitation. This angry young man's finger points towards a society that is grounded on corrupt practices and nepotism in the
place of sincerity and hard work. The playwright's ironic and farcical manipulations of the lines of India's national anthem and other popular songs expose the tall talks of a society where the deprived are trampled upon by the various arms of the establishment.

Presented episodically, The King's Drum offers no complication of denouement. The pyramid of dramatic action of this play reveals just the opposite of the classical one of dramatic action suggested by Gustau Freytag.

![Diagram of Pyramidal Structure](image)

**Fig.:** The Pyramidal structure of Dramatic Plot (Hudson 201).

But the actions of The King's Drum neither move to any particular complication nor do they end anywhere. The play just goes on as it was in the beginning. This peculiarity of this play provides an anti-pyramidal dramatic structure that can be represented as below:

![Diagram of Plot Structure](image)

**Fig.:** The plot structure of The King's Drum

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a) Exposure</th>
<th>b) Initial incidence</th>
<th>c) Flashback</th>
<th>d) Anti-climax</th>
<th>e) Back to exposition</th>
<th>f) Exposure</th>
<th>g) Initial incidence</th>
<th>h) Flashback</th>
<th>i) Anti-climax</th>
<th>j) Back to exposition</th>
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<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>Initial incidents</td>
<td>Rising action/Growth/Complication</td>
<td>Climax/Crisis/Turning Point</td>
<td>Falling Action / Resolution / Denouement</td>
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Instead of moving up towards a definite complication, here the dramatic actions shows a frequent falling down into structural abysses, only to come back again to the initial situations.

Attack! On the Need to be Offensive

The first requisite of people's theatre is that it must be a recreation. Theatre ought to be the source of energy, this is the second requisite... Theatre ought to be a guiding light to the intelligence. Joy, intelligence, energy are the fundamental requisites of people's theatre. (Rolland 28-29)

Romain Rolland was an ardent defender of the utilitarian theory of art, who believed that a combination of joy, intelligence and energy would make people's theatre more effective. According to him theatre should not be an instrument of inquisitional torture to the audience and it should not depend upon sensationalism and melodrama that would leave the audience depressed and discouraged. Theatre has to be thought-propellant, exhaling and refreshing.

Safdar Hashmi's street plays never deviate into mere sentimentalism and never they become a boring political declamation. A combination of political purpose, didactic elements and wide entertainment possibilities make his theatre distinctive and effective. With convincing arguments and realistic portrayal he enlightens the working class about their own condition. The humorous presentation techniques easily drive home his intended message to the audience.
Hallabol (Attack) is a modified version of Janam's previous street play titled Chakkajam (Stop the Wheels), a theatrical expression of solidarity to the striking industrial labourers, who were on a seven days strike in response to a call given by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) in November 1989 (Nukkad 2002 67). The five point demand of this historic strike were: a) fix a minimum wage of Rs. 1050; b) release of a daily Dearness Allowance of Rs.2; c) stopping of contractual labour policy in the factories; d) equal wage for equal work; and e) build baby-homes in factory premises. The earlier play was a campaign piece designed to boost the morale of the striking workers. After the end of the strike, Janam modified the earlier play into a more elaborate street play in December 1989.

The primary ideological focus on the play is to raise the consciousness of the working class on the need to continue their struggles beyond the temporary gains. The play tells them that only an insistent and intermittent struggle could bring them their deserving rights in a profit based capitalistic society. Attack warns the working class about the reactionary tendencies among them and the sectarian interests that would ultimately weaken the unity of the toiling mass and would help the exploiters subjugate the workers more efficiently. Safdar Hashmi, in Attack, also touches the need for gender unity in political protest.

Though thematically a simple one, structurally Attack is comparatively more complex than all other street plays of Safdar Hashmi. This play is an example of Safdar's gradually developing
dramatic workmanship where he goes for some meta-theatrical techniques. Unlike other street plays of Janam discussed earlier, Attack has a sub-plot that is finally liked to the main plot excellently and indistinguishably. More importantly, this play is the most direct and specifically declaring his political affiliations by glorifying a particular trade union and waving its flag frequently during the performances.

In the earlier plays, Safdar Hashmi’s political references were rather general, but, in Attack, he asks the people join a particular trade union outfit. So this play signifies Safdar’s growing political consciousness and affirmation of his frank partisanship. Attack is a clarion call for direct, insistent, and widespread political protest against exploitation. The play starts with a choric song that inspires the working class for a long struggle and expresses their irreversible power of determination in the face of suppression.

Struggle is our answer to every injustices and exploitations.

Now this is only a collision, the war lies ahead.

We’ve seen and will see again, how mighty you are.

We’ve seen and will see again, how big are your jails. (97)

The plot deals with the effort of Janam's attempt to perform a street play at a factory gate. The police constable stops them playing a political street play with slogans and red flags. He threatens the performers by saying, “Is this how a drama is played? With shouting slogans, waving red flags and holding posters!! Off the place, quickly,
otherwise, I'll put everyone in the lockup"(97). In spite of all the convincing arguments, the constable is defiant not to allow any politics in the play. Finally he gives permission to play a non-political play without any slogans and flags. Whenever the names of the trade union or the word "strike", or "comrade" is mentioned he immediately intervenes.

**Constable:** Look,...hey....What's going on? Do the drama...drama, this slogan shoutings won't do.

**Narrator:** But Sir, in our drama, these things will be there.

**Constable:** They may be there in our drama, ...but these won't be possible in my area. The strict order has come right from the time of the seven days' strike. Our SHO's order is to put those people, who utter the word, 'CITU', immediately behind the bars. Their demands will be heard only later on. (98)

The frequent interventions of street plays by the police were the order of the days during the 1970s, especially before and during the Emergency. The establishment always rightly understood the immense political potency street plays. Safdar Hashmi was always sharply critical of this prevention and censorship of artistic expression. He analyses the ideological implications of such highhandedness of the establishment as:

The police does not disrupt the quack who sells spurious medicines, it does not prevent the *bandarwala* from
showing his tricks, nor the snake charmer and what have you. On the other hand it exploits these people by taking cuts from their daily earnings. The police object to street theatre not because it holds up traffic, which it does not do in any case, but because it is political in nature. It suppresses it, it attacks it because it takes up topical political issues and analyses them scientifically for its audience. The police in suppressing street theatre act as an arm of the state, which is becoming increasingly intolerant of dissent and protest. *(Right 5)*

The police, in all Safdar Hashmi’s plays, is a symbol of intolerance and oppression by the state machinery. This depiction of the police is rather realistic in Indian context than caricaturist. The lowly and libidinal behaviour of the head constable in *Attack* serves to be dig at the ignorance and servile attitude of our law-enforcement system.

When denied permission to perform a play about the on-going labour strike, the actors, in the play-within-the-play, on the suggestion of the head constable, performs the story of an industrial workers who is in love. The narrator directly addresses the audience to inform them of the frequent change in the play due to the police intervention.

**Narrator:** *(To the audience)* Well, my brothers and sisters, we are again making some changes in the play. These changes are thanks to the kindness of our Hawaldar sir. *(To the actors)* Come on, ... let’s start again. *(101)*
The love-tale of the protagonist Jogi, an industrial worker, provides enough humorous moments to the play. After the repeated demands from his beloved, Jogi gathers some courage and goes to her father with a marriage proposal, only to meet with heavy thrashes with broom. The parents were not ready to give their daughter to an industrial worker whose fixed wage was Rs. 562 in a month. Jogi hesitantly reveals his designation to her parents.

Father: Stop beating about the bush. Tell me what do you do?

Jogi: I'm working in a factory.

Mother: What's your job? Are you a Manager?

Jogi: Yes, ...no, ... just below him.

Father: Supervisor?

Jogi: No, ...just below.

Mother: Depot in-charge?

Jogi: Just a little more below!

Father: Accountant?

Jogi: No just a little more below.

Both Father & Mother: And below? What...?... Are you worker?

Jogi: Yes, machine man. (103)

Low-wages, uncertain job and inhuman working conditions in factories made the workers even not suitable for a decent marriage. The psychological inferiority of the labourer is a social phenomenon of the contemporary industrial capitalism in India. Attack explains the
real conditions of the labourers in Delhi:

**Father:** My daughter, you don’t know anything about the condition of Delhi’s workers?

**Mother:** Today there is job,.. and tomorrow there is no job.

**Father:** This factory is closed today, tomorrow, the other one.

**Mother:** Live in dirty slums. No electricity, no water.

**Father:** Suffer the threats of goons and criminals.

**Mother:** Everyday, the assault of police.

**Father:** And spend your Nights in Tihar jail. (104)

*Attack* can be called a right agitprop play that encourages the proletariat to stick to the struggle setting aside all reactionary tendencies, sectarian feelings and gender biases. This is a theatrical call for the unity of all working class that reminds them of the enemy, the exploiters who always look for chances to make breaches in the labour unity.

In a patriarchal society, the women are always dominated over by their male counter parts. Among working class too, their demands are looked down upon by the male co-workers. While males in the ranks and files of the trade union movement ignore the demands of the female workers, the unity of the protest movement gets challenged. Parvati, a female worker in *Attack*, is assertive of her demands, primarily as a working-mother. Initially, her concerns about the safety of her boy were not shared by the male workers.
One day, as her husband had got a day's job somewhere and there was no one at home to look after the baby. Parvati went to the factory taking her baby. But she was not permitted to enter the factory with her little baby, by the security guard. When she complained to the union, the union leaders expressed their helplessness. Then union leader Rampal and Parvati engage in a verbal debate:

**Rampal:** What can the Union do in this matter?

**Parvati:** Why can’t it? There should be some facility in the mill to keep the children safe. This was also one of the demands of our strike.

**Rampal:** Look, Parvati, we are on strike with the big demands like Rs. 1050 wage, Rs. 2 DA, against the contractual system, etc. Now the owner is scared. He has to relent, if we just strengthen our struggle a little more. The small issues like this will weaken our fight.

**Parvati:** Small issue? This is not a small issue, Rampal. This is the question of my job.... One of the CITU’s demands was the construction of a baby home. That’s why all women came along. Isn’t it? With the women, has the strike become weak? Don’t be a maniac. (112-13)

This is a mature street play by Safdar Hashmi where he displays more skill in craftsmanship. The lengthy monologues of the Narrator in the previous plays is replaced here with shot focused dialogues between characters. Without much interventions and interpretations by the narrator, the actions in the drama stands linked together. The
action continuously progresses towards a logical conclusion.

Unlike the other plays here rhetorical questions are very rarely used. To gain maximum impact, the playwright attempts to multiple repetitions (like Rs. 562 to denote a laborers poor condition) and frequent references to the low wages of the labourers during the dramatic action. Similarly songs are extensively used to describe the condition of labourers as well as to encourage the striking labourers in the audience to keep on with their struggle. The songs are very effective and political with revolutionary messages. An example of such a song in Attack is given below:

Like various tunes mingle into a single note...
Like little flames combine into a fire...
Just like the light is spread from lamp to lamp...
Let's put together our sacrifices,
To move forward in unity...
To move forward in unity. (116)