THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

The fundamental difference between post-independence theatre and the earlier types of urban production is not the exclusion of the ‘alien’ influences but the self-conscious redefinition of theatre as a formally complex and socially significant art. This chapter attempts to review the aesthetic and political prototype of modernity and modernism which developed in the most vibrant period of colonial India with Surabhi as a case in point. The study recognizes the significance of including colonial theatre forms in modern critical studies of theatre history and criticism in India today. Surabhi Theatres with its 128 years of experience stands testimony to this hybrid creativity.

Modernity in Indian theatre is related to the phases of nationalist discourse in pre and post-independent India. The potential of theatre to interact with the audience, to generate immediate response and to incite the viewer, made it the vehicle of anti-colonial polemic during the colonial period. The fear of the colonial authority on the incendiary thematic and performative aspects of the theatre was reflected by the enactment of the Dramatic Performances Act of 1879 (Bhatia 19, Dalmia 59-60) which pushed the national and political protest theatre underground which later cautiously surfaced in allegorical and symbolic forms in productions of a historical or mythological nature.

The performances by commercial and itinerant drama companies of Parsis and Marathis was followed by the founding of number of local theatre organizations in south India, which reached out to wider and varied audience after 1920s. This trend, coupled with a growing interest in English literature and study of Sanskrit
classics created new interest in educated urban based youths who joined theatre as playwrights and artists. By 1920s, the number of local itinerant companies was considerable and theatre emerged as the single largest mass entertainer.

With the beginning of National movement, and intensification of political activities, national struggle for independence became the concern of the popular theatre. Nationalists saw in them a much needed tool to spread their message effectively. This led to the politicization of popular theatre in this period. But with the emergence of the cinema the commercial company dramas gradually disappeared thus ending its golden period. The film industry reflected the theatre tradition of the early twentieth century incorporating entertainment forms of song, dance, mythic themes, elements of political and social protest plays and the folk drama.

The present study has documented an era of Indian theatre that has not been part of serious scholarship thus far. It is important at this juncture to recapitulate the history of Indian theatre in 20th century to realize that such documentation is critical for both contemporary research and future studies in the field. While the introductory chapter took the linear mode of studying Surabhi theatre, this final chapter attempts a reverse journey – going backwards to trace the aspects that have come under the rubric of our studies on Indian theatre thus far. It is not given a status of literature review, but presented here to highlight the omission of the crucial art of study, which this study hopes to bridge. The study emphasizes the need to place popular theatre as an essential aspect of theatre history. It also argues how Surabhi’s practices can throw light on some of the contemporary concerns still haunt the theatre practitioners. In the process this study hopes to provide a non-orientalist
reading of Indian theatre traditions – folk, classical, popular, contemporary and others.

The early modern theatre in India emerged under the shadow of the British rule, which steered in various differences in theatre practices in India. G. P. Deshpande in his introduction to *Modern Indian Drama, an Anthology*, (2000) lists out the trends alleged by early modern Indian theatre practitioners:

- **Theatre bound by ‘text’**: The traditional theatre in India was greatly influenced by the primacy of word that distinguished it from the European theatre where the text played a prominent role.

- **Theatre of words**: The traditional theatre had music, dance and the narrative. But the new theatre was fascinated by the new prose style which was marked by long flowing sentences, ornate speech and sanskritization of speech.

- **Theatre of realism**: Excessive dependence on realism resulted in the absence of songs and dance in the new theatre.

Following the political independence in 1947, India witnessed ‘decolonization’ of life, arts and culture in a conscious attempt to define ‘Indianess’. Theatre in post-independent India engaged with creating a new idiom of national theatre combining linguistic and performative forms of indigenous theatre with the narratives of classical and modern tradition. Two institutions played a vital role in the development of theatre in India viz. Sangeet Nataka Akademi and The National School of Drama.
Sangeet Nataka Akademi, a premier body for promotion of theatre and music at the national scale, articulated in the Drama Seminar of 1956 and Nehru Centenary Theatre Festival of 1989; its rationale was to define a national theatre that accommodated the legacy of multiple theatrical traditions, while reflecting the political and cultural aspirations of a new nation. Sangeet Nataka Akademi critiqued the political nature of IPTA, the “imperialist impositions” of realistic proscenium theatre and the commercialization of Parsi theatre and promoted a pan-Indian theatre community through:

i. Theatre festivals that support artists who develop and sustain traditional/folk forms

ii. Seminars that promote theatre sensibility across the country

iii. Translation and publication of plays that create a dramatic canon

The National School of Drama was setup in 1959 by Sangeet Natak Akademi, which in 1975, became an independent entity, fully financed by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. Besides the training programme which is of three years duration, the School has explored new vistas for the decentralization of theatre training through workshops under the Extension Programme. In 1999, the School organized its first National Theatre Festival, Bharat Rang Mahotsav which has since been an annual event.

Seminars, conferences and theatre festivals have been organized to define and showcase ‘Indian theatre’. The first drama seminar organized by the government of India on Indian Drama and Theatre in 1956, was the bedrock of all the structures of thoughts on theatre. In 1956, the participants of the seminar, took it
for granted that there was an entity called ‘Indian theatre’, which is ‘a sum total of all our regional theatre’. The seminar also provided for the categorization of the theatre as ‘commercial’, ‘folk’ and ‘amateur theatre’.

The Round table conferences organized by the Sangeet Natak Akademi in the years 1966 on ‘Folk arts’ and 1971 on ‘Modern Relevance of Tradition in Theatre’ brought together scholars and practitioners of theatre which paved the way for an era of experimentation.

The Tagore Centenary Festival in 1961, the Contemporary theatre festival in 1972, Bhopal Festival in 1975, the Shadow Puppet theatre in 1978, the Kutiyattam Festival in 1982, the Nukkad Nataka Mela in 1983, the Nehru Centenary Festival in 1989, the Folk Performing Arts festival in 1997 and the National theatre festival in 1997, were all landmarks in the history of Indian theatre and legitimized several theatre traditions of India. Incorporated with critical debates on theatre in India, these festivals concerned themselves with quality and standards of contemporary Indian theatre.

This period also saw the emergence of the ‘director’ and “audiences started reacting to the director and the ‘production’ mattered as much as the play” (Deshpande xv). Eminent playwrights and directors like B. V. Karanth, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, M.K. Raina, Ranjit Kapur and others were aware of the multiplicity of the forms that modern theatre employs and have through training workshops and individual productions in their regions generated a new enthusiasm for theatre as a serious artistic activity.
One of the crucial challenges confronting post-Independence India has been to find its own distinctive identity as a country, which has been distorted in many ways by more than a century of foreign domination. In an attempt to connect with the tradition without being termed ‘revivalists’ and to become modern without imitating western theatrical forms, Indian playwrights of the 1960s, took to experimentation with the various prevailing trends in theatre in different parts of the country. This gave rise to the birth of theatrical expression which was distinctive and yet shared certain common contemporary social concerns.

The performative traditions of ancient India were evaluated in the light of modern aesthetics in the post-colonial period. Directors like Habib Tanvir in Hindi, Sombhu Mitra in Bengali, and later B.V. Karanth in Kannada and K.N. Panikkar in Malayalam, initiated “an encounter with the tradition, to match the intensity with which the modern theatre had arisen with violent rupture from the indigenous theatre” (Awasthi “Performance”). This new theatre engaged with the twin themes of identity and roots in experimental modes of performance. The significant features of this theatre include:

i. Rejection and violation of the conventions of the proscenium stage and the use of a variety of performance spaces to bring about a closer relationship between the actors and the spectators (Awasthi 1985, 36).

ii. Restoration of theatrical forms marginalized as ‘vulgar’ under colonial control, especially the use of dance and popular songs.

iii. Experimentation in themes and performance techniques and incorporating the traditional and folk forms of our theatre.

iv. Reorientation of Sanskrit classics to reflect contemporary reality.
The socio-political activities that took place in the 1960s developed into a full-fledged movement by the 1970s and its impact was felt on the cultural scene. The period marked the beginning of the gradual collapse of certain values, norms and customs that were identified with the pre-independence era.

The period also witnessed an intellectual ferment in the theatre scene. It was a period of experiments with new ideas and formalist styles influenced both by contemporary trends in the West as well as reinterpretation of indigenous traditions. The philosophy of Existentialism of Sartre and Camus, the theatre of the Absurd and Brecht’s theories were replacing Shaw, Ibsen and Stanislavsky in the thinking of Indian playwrights and producers.

The experimental performance of the 1960s have indicated that the practitioners of the new drama “have forged a reactive cultural identity for themselves by disclaiming colonial practices and by seeking to reclaim classical and other pre-colonial Indian traditions of performance as the only viable media of effective decolonization” (Dharwadker 2). This new generation of theatre practitioners attempted to rediscover their own mythologies, past histories and folk cultural forms and transformed them on stage in a style suitable to contemporary Indian audience.

Habib Tanvir (b 1923) was the first successful playwright to break away from the realistic theatre. Characterized by a sense of gaiety and celebration his theatre synthesized the folk and modern forms. In Maharashtra, the avant-garde playwright Vijay Tendulkar (b1928) influenced an entire generation of playwrights whose work revealed the social, political and artistic concerns of the present. In
Bengal, Badal Sircar’s (b1925) plays opened the doors of the theatre to the drama of ideas and his innovative staging methods brought the theatre to the poor.

In Karnataka, Girish Karnad (b 1938) was a key contributor to the self-reflexive theorizing about a quintessentially ‘Indian’ theatre that began in the late 1950s. Almost all his plays engage with the pre-modern cultural past rather than the historical present, and experiments in various ways with indigenous genres. Chandrashekar Kambar (b1937) a playwright steeped in the idiom of the native folk theatre uses theatre to communicate a modernist vision dealing with the dualities of human existence. Both Karnad and Kambar have demonstrated that the matter of myth and legend resonates in modern experience, and the past history of the nation anticipates its present. B. V. Karanth (b 1928) actor, translator and director experimented and evolved various alternatives and as far as music was concerned he created a new syntax of music for theatre. He was a pioneer and trend setter for a theatre that was rooted in the Indian ethos.

In Manipur, the experimental theatre evolved in the early sixties of the twentieth century. Arambarn Samarendra (1935) moved away from the romanticized style and design and tried to probe into the prevalent social system, thereby starting a process of introspection among the youth. Ratan Thiyam (1948) emphasized on visual designs and the formal aspects of the play. Many of his visuals forms were imitated from the forms of Nat Sankritana². On the other hand playwrights like Kanhailal and Lokendra Arambarn indulged in ‘physical theatre’ and attempted thematic experiments. Kanhailal in his works Pebet, Tamnalai and Kabui-keioiba portrayed the contemporary degrading Manipuri society using
mythical elements and folk stories. These plays appealed to the collective consciousness of Manipuri people to rise against the external exploiters.

The advent of the proscenium was a radical change in Indian theatre and post-independence theatre has been a constant effort to transcend it. The elevated stage, the front and drop curtains and the wings served to separate the audience from the performers. The spectator-as-participant was replaced by the spectator-as-onlooker.

Badal Sircar’s ‘Third theatre’ was a conscious revolt against the proscenium. It grew out of the realization that theatre should not only reflect human conditions, but should also endeavor to make the audience aspire to change the present condition. Therefore it became apparent that theatre has to be taken close to the people. As this was not possible with the proscenium theatre Sircar evolved a flexible, portable and inexpensive theatre the ‘third theatre’ or the ‘free theatre’. Street theatre or the protest theatre of the left was also motivated by similar concerns.

Contemporary Indian theatre borrows the idea of self-representation from the ‘Theatre of the Roots’ movement. However, unlike the latter’s rejection of the colonial legacy of naturalism and realism, the contemporary theatre sought to redefine the ‘modern’ in the Indian context to include the influences of the classical, folk traditions along with those of the West. The period after the 1970s marks the beginnings of a new movement in Indian theatre.

Serious criticism and the analytical study of performances and playwriting emerged in the 1950s when major journals and newspapers engaged academic critics
to review theatre performances. In 1960s the first theatre journal was started with the publication of *Natrang* (in Hindi) edited by N. C. Jain and later *Enact* (in English) edited by Rajender Paul. These journals were effective in reflecting theatre activities throughout the country.

Studies on Indian theatre range from the Indian classical (*Rasa* theory based on the *Natyasastra*), Greek classical (Mimesis based on Aristotle’s *Poetics*), and Western theories of aesthetics such as semiotics, anthropological theories, feminist, historical and translation studies.


Comprehensive accounts of Indian theatre present the idea of a continuous theatre tradition from Sanskrit drama through traditional forms. Studies such as Adya Rangacharya’s *The Indian Theatre* (1971) and Nemichandra Jain’s *Indian Theatre: Tradition, Continuity and Change* (1992) regard post-independence theatre as “an unformed, often unsatisfactory postscript” (Dharwadker 5). R. K. Yajnik’s *The Indian Theatre: Its Origins and Its Later Developments Under European Influence* (1970) traces the growth of Sanskrit theatre and the rise of
modern theatre in the 19th century, overlooking the theatres in the period in-between.

Western scholarship and commentary on Indian theatre beginning from William Jones and Sylvain Levi in the 18th and 19th centuries to Ralph Yarrow in the 21st century have focused on the ‘ancient exquisite theatre’ of India, relating “theatricality and performance in India to the social and spiritual life of a given community” (Dharwadker 7-8).

Influenced by the ‘orientalist’ scholarship, Indian playwrights, directors cultural theorists and critics have debated and articulated the concepts of ‘indigenous’ and ‘alien’ practices in playwriting and performance. This debate between the traditionalists who wanted to reject the legacy of colonial structures and the ‘modernists’ who wanted a reinvigorated and syncretistic modernity generated critical theories which involved various aspects of dramatization.

Such studies have resulted in theorists constructing the ‘Modern Indian Drama’ as the sum of all the regional theatre and do not distinguish between periods or forms. These new disciplinary perspectives were not concerned with theatre as a commercial urban institution, but with the place of performance within the ritualistic, religious, or social life of particular communities. The studies outlined above, in an explicitly decolonizing strain ignored the Westernized urban theatre as it represented the damaging colonialist legacies that must be countered through a return to pre-colonial, indigenous traditions of performance.

It was not until the late twentieth century that serious scholarship was taken on by scholars on the much neglected commercial urban theatre. Nandhi Bhatia’s
Acts of Authority/Acts of Resistance (2004) examines theatre in colonial India to reveal “forgotten stories of theatrical resistance” (Bhatia 3). The study begins by contesting the marginalization of theatre in postcolonial studies and examines dramatic texts which challenged colonial authority. Aparna Dharwadker in her book Theatres of Independence (2006) defines post-independence period as “historically demarcated”, as there has been no clear historicization or periodization of the modern, and very little discursive engagement with the paradoxes and ambivalences of Indian modernity across the colonial/postcolonial divide. Erin B. Mee in her book Theatre of Roots: Redirecting the Modern Indian Stage (2008) challenges Aparna Dharwadker’s “anti-modern” charges on the ‘theatre of roots’ movement and argues that the movement emerged in response to Western-inspired modern theatre in India and a major step towards decolonization of contemporary Indian theatre. Susan Seizer in her book, Stigmas of the Tamil Stage (2006) had deliberated on the lives of the popular theatre artists of ‘Special Drama’, a genre of performance unique to the southernmost Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Theatre in Colonial India: Play-House of Power (2009) edited by Lata Singh is a collection of essays on the pre-independence practices in colonial India and is an important step towards creating a body of scholarly material in this subject. Obscuring the earlier distinctions between Indian and Western criticism, these studies point to the consolidation of modern Indian theatre studies as a scholarly field and mark a decisive movement away from Orientalist legacies.

Contemporary Indian theatre is as varied as its languages and its terrain. Developed in the royal courts during the classical age and religious centers in the medieval period, post-independence theatre came to be regarded as a serious art
form and was incorporated into the nation-building process. The two major theatre events organized by the Sangeet Nataka Akademi in the 1950s - the National Drama Festival and the National Drama Seminar - set the stage for a conscious development of theatre. The political impetus for the search for ‘Indianess’ was the call from the leaders of a new independent nation, that had also experienced the ravages of the Partition. Half a century later the priorities of the nation have changed and the questions raised became complex.

In 2008, a number of theatre practitioners, scholars and theatre lovers came together under the aegis of Indian theatre forum at Heggodu, Karnataka, in an attempt to ‘create a national resource for theatre and a meeting ground for all those who wish to contribute for excellence and diversity in theatrical endeavor’. This seminar called the ‘Not-the-Drama-Seminar’, sought to “historicize our current theatrical practices which included two critical processes: the act of contextualizing, and the act of problematizing” (Deshpande Sudhanva 14).

This seminar, which was not a commemoration of the 1956 Drama Seminar was a call for ‘action’ and visibly declared that “theatre is still on an evolutionary path, seeking its own contours” and was ‘still coming to grips with its complex identity’. (Deshpande Sudhanva 19). The Seminar which included eminent theatre practitioners from ‘non-traditional and non-commercial’ groups provided a platform, to interrogate the challenges, the impediments of practice, policy and implementation. The major issues discussed in the seminar were:
1. **Cultural Policy in India**

The post-independence, nation-state acknowledged the importance of culture in building a new India and articulated the need for state support for arts and culture. The then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Education Minister Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad were in the forefront of such a vision:

In a democratic regime, the arts can derive their sustenance only from the people, and the State as the organized manifestation of the people’s will, must, therefore, undertake its maintenance and development as one of its first responsibilities (Azad quoted in Haksar Committee 1990, 19).

Consequently culture became an important part of the Five Year Plans and the setting up of ‘the cluster of cultural institutions’ including the National Museum, the Sahitya Akademi, the Sangeet Natak Akademi and the Lalit Kala Akademi as repositories of Indian culture was undertaken.

These institutions determined the cultural policy of the nation and also the dominant paradigms for the ‘arts and culture’ field as a whole. ‘Cultural nationalism’ became a rubric within which the state determined what forms of art and culture need addressing and how those should be addressed.

Radhika, in a report on ‘Study on Emergent Arts and Culture Spaces in Urban India’ observes that, with the intervention from the state, the Classical and folk forms became a significant area of investment by the nation-state, while other areas that did not seem fit within the rubric of cultural nationalism fell outside the purview of policy.
While all the state sponsored institutions recognized, and supported contemporary art practices, both classical (including music and dance) and explicitly modernist (most prominently contemporary literature, theatre, visual art and film), there is virtually “no definitive space for autonomous contemporary art practice as such in any of the founding documents of national cultural policy in the period of the 1950s-60s” (Radhika 11).

The consequence of the critique of the bureaucratization of state culture institutions was the demand of a complete ‘non-interference’ and ‘non-management’ of culture by the state: “We wish to declare unmistakably that we are for less and not more State control of art. We want art programmes to be administered by artists and not bureaucrats” (Haksar Committee 1990, 41).

However, the practitioners of art especially performing arts believe that the development and wider cultivation of the arts would be seriously handicapped, in fact almost impossible, without the active support and involvement of the state (Jain 200). Many practitioners proposed that the state should play a catalytic role in the development and progress of culture.

2. **Space:**

Lack of theatre space (for rehearsals and performances) has been a major concern for theatre practitioners in the present times. Well designed Playhouses with affordable and basic equipment are the need of the hour. The architects of theatre are audience friendly and cater to the comfort of the audience, which include spacious chairs, carpeted aisles, well lit staircases, spacious vehicle parking and emergency exits. But curiously enough, very little thought has gone into the comfort
of the actor. Most theatres have poor acoustics, unhygienic cloakrooms and shabby green rooms which are very far from the stage. Traditionally, spaces for performance and showcasing art have been the hall (music, dance, theatre performance) and the gallery (visual art-painting). Today, there is a transformation of not only performance styles but also the spaces for arts and culture.

Today, alternate spaces include lecture-demonstrations by musicians and dancers, poetry-reading cum performances, play readings, conversation with eminent writers, poets, thinkers and scientists, preview of the work in progress and presentation by film makers. Theatre practitioners are presently using the basic concepts on which traditional theatre was based - the flexibility of time and space, greater reliance on the actor, stylization and music.

Sanjana Kapoor, Director of Prithivi theatre, Mumbai, explores the innovative policies that will facilitate the process of connecting performances to audiences. Taking inspiration from Brazil’s model organization that runs comprehensive cultural and arts facilities, Sanjana Kapoor propounds a project that will provide space for proscenium theatre, experimental theatre, open air performance space, workshop space, exhibition galleries, library and music court (Deshpande Sudhanva188).

Political force with a sustainable public-private partnership supported by the revenue department (both state and central), the tourism ministry, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and other local governing bodies and the Corporate force to adopt venues, and provide financial plans for each venue together can be yoked together to build cultural institutions and become true patrons of the arts.
3. **Audience:**

The development of post-independence theatre as a largely on-commercial urban enterprise has placed it in a particularly disadvantageous relation to the popular and mass media. The core urban audience for serious theatre is a tiny fraction of the total audience for film and television, but even this audience divides its leisure and recourses between theatre and other media.

The theatre event embodies dynamism, creating a vibrant and alive texture within which individual and collective subjectivities play against and to each other. The production of theatre performance anticipates reception. The relationship between a theatre performance and the audience is a symbiotic one. There have been many articulations which point to the indispensability of spectator in the context of theatre performance. If the house is not full, not only does the performance lose money but it also ‘loses force’.

The traditional Indian theatre has always attracted the audience mostly due to its imaginative quality and the spontaneous and living relationship with the community and its life. These performances become special social occasions when the entire community gets together to participate in them. European realism, on the other hand, concentrated on replicating the appearance of social reality and provoked the spectator’s empathy and subsequent understanding, but prevented their ability to act by inducing only passive consumption as invoked by classical model. In addition, the post-modern spectator who may be a traveler, visitor, citizen, resident, short or long term, differs significantly from the culturally positioned spectator of the traditional theatre. Further, the new forms of electronic
entertainment that have entered the Indian homes have altered the tastes of the people who prefer to be entertained in their drawing rooms. The ‘colossal presence’ of mass media of radio, television, film and video and the absence of theatre going tradition among the urban, middle class audience in India has placed contemporary theatre in a disadvantageous position.

4. ‘Stagable’ plays

India has produced great playwrights over its ostensibly 2,000 years old theatre tradition. Contemporary playwrights in an attempt to move towards an ‘Indian’ drama, used elements from the classical tradition, folk tradition and modern theatrical concepts specially western concepts like the existential, absurd, and concepts like realism, symbolism and expressionism to delve into the psychological aspects of their characters. Though the themes and concepts were western, the way they were handled gave the play a theatrical innovation which was altogether Indian.

The post-independence playwrights were also benefited by the institution of modern print culture, which conferred legitimacy and currency on plays as printed texts which became available for analysis, commentary and interpretation outside the boundaries of performance.

There had been an efflorescence of play writing in the 1960s and the 1970s. The post colonial theatre provided the playwrights to write plays on topical themes in new, indigenous and effective forms and many of the plays of the period being translated and performed in several languages. However this exhilaration lasted for a short period and gave way to new trends like ‘performance piece’ which evolved
in a workshop or through improvisation and research. The ‘performance piece’, though novel and energetic depended on technology and catered to elite theatre group.

A strong need was felt for good ‘stagable’ plays by the directors who turned to translation of plays from other languages thereby making theatre “to spill over the barriers of language and region” which in turn provided for “a wide exchange of scripts, directors, technicians and actors” (Jain 10). Given the plurality of theatre languages in India, a single source play became the nucleus of a particular record by generating multiple indigenized versions, all of which bear a family resemblance to each other. Though alternatives have been provided, contemporary theatre is experiencing a peculiar quandary of identifying playwrights who can hold the attention and interest of the modern audience.

Issues and concerns found in main stream theatre are not new to Surabhi Theatres. However, their methods of handling the same creatively, distinguishes them from the others.

Starting from a very humble background Surabhi has grown, over years, in stature and has proved that a family profession can achieve success as no other commercial enterprise can. The family unity, though often threatened by internal dissensions and external attractions, is the one reason that sustained Surabhi and made it, perhaps, the only professional family theatre in the world to function for 130 years.

In 1950 there were about 35 registered Surabhi groups and 30 unregistered groups. With cinema making inroads into towns and villages the number of groups
dwindled to 25 by 1970s. By 1990s the number was down to five. Though each Surabhi company is independent in its own functioning, all the Surabhi companies came under the banner of Surabhi Nataka Kala Sangham. The immediate purpose of the Sangham is to create a fraternity among all Surabhi groups and offer help when needed. The Sangham had spearheaded several steps to ameliorate the working conditions of the Surabhi artists. It also approaches government officials and other patrons for solving the problems of the companies and helping them further.

Over the last fifty years, things have changed substantially. Because of overhead expenses, it has become burdensome for company managers to continue activity. Financial inability and the desire of some of the important actors to leave and take up non-professional jobs (mainly freelancing) resulted in the winding up of companies.

At present five major companies exist and are engaged in doing theatre. Large expenditure and lack of security to fall back on during emergencies have pushed the Surabhi theatres on the verge of extinction.

These surviving companies have had the advantage of the help and guidance of theatre enthusiasts like Mr., K.V. Ramana IAS, Garimella Ramurthy and others who have recognized the role of Surabhi theatres in creating the theatrical heritage of Andhra and have ensured the recognition of Surabhi theatres by the State and Central governments. The Department of Culture, Government of India and the State Government of Andhra Pradesh have provided financial assistance worth few lakhs of rupees every year for the five companies. With the support of the State
Government, the Surabhi theatres were able to engage in successful tours within Andhra Pradesh and other neighboring states. In the late 1990s Sri Venkateswara Natya Mandli, one of the major surviving Surabhi groups was granted permission by the State Government to erect their stage at Lalita Kala Thoranam, Public gardens, Hyderabad. Here they stage their plays every Friday, Saturday and Sunday, the entrance fee being Rs. 25/- per head.

Moving to Hyderabad had been advantageous to the Surabhi group in many ways.

a. Children were able to attain undisturbed education. Many of the current generation actors have completed their graduation and post-graduation.

b. The urban exposure had given the artist the confidence to venture into other areas of interest like computers, graphics, architecture etc.

c. Many officials and bureaucrats acquainted themselves with Surabhi theatres which led to the latter being invited to theatre festivals organized by Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts and the National School of Drama, New Delhi (2010, 2011). Participating in National and International theatre festivals provided Surabhi an opportunity to interact with practitioners of various theatre forms. This nationwide exposure had helped Surabhi to be acquainted with theatre stalwart B. V. Karanth who conducted three workshops for Surabhi artists. Such participation was also the basis for Surabhi to be invited to Paris, France to stage plays at the international theatre festival Passages in May 2013.

The awards and honours bestowed recently on Surabhi have definitely been encouraging to the Surabhi artists. ‘Surabhi’ Babji was in 2013 presented the
prestigious ‘Padminashree’ award and the Sangeet Natak Award in 2011 for his
service to the world of theatre. The awards and honours are a testimony of the
legacy of the Surabhi tradition which in S.V.Subbanna’s words has survived due to
its long “communitarian roots” (124). However these awards have not provided the
Surabhi artists the sense of security. “We are struggling with theatre because we do
not know anything other than theatre. We feel honoured that our art is recognized
and appreciated. But we will be really happy if all this admiration will help us to
lead a secured life” (Babji, Personal interview, 25-12-2011). Surabhi theatres today
stand testimony to the only professionally oriented and commercially viable theatre
group entertaining the rural and semi-rural audiences in the region of Andhra.
Having inherited the ethics and ethos of a distinctive theatre this group has for the
past 128 years successfully contributed in the establishment of the performance
tradition of this country. The group hopes that their achievements in the past would
help them to claim a ‘cultural heritage status’ in the field of theatre and that the
government (State or Centre) sponsored cultural institution could be established
which can accommodate all the performing arts of the state. “We hope the
government will support us in the establishment of an institution, similar to K.V.
Subbanna’s Ninasam in, Heggodu, Karnataka. This institution should include
theatre school, a repertory company and a workshop unit. This institution could offer
alternate spaces for other theatrical activities and at the same time provide us a
livelihood” (Babji, Personal interview, 25-12-2011).

The commercial company drama, which was seen as a ‘desert of imitation’,
opposing all the habits of representation and spectatorship that was most suited to
Indian culture was marginalized by the theatre /cultural theorist of the new nation-
state (Dharwadker 137). Surabhi theatres, which was influenced by the traditional theatre forms of Andhra and modern Parsi theatre developed under the guidance of its elders and was supported by the community which nurtured it. With no support from the government and not included by the policy makers of the nation, Surabhi had over the last half century created its own idiom, translating, adapting and improvising the plays to suit its audience which chiefly consisted of rural, semi-rural and partially educated populace.

Being categorised within non-traditional forms of cultural production, Surabhi theatres were seen as part of the commercial circuit and did not enjoy the support of the cultural policies of the government. However, this group through their creative and experimental approach had established alternative spaces, catering to and creating their own audience. Surabhi theatres never entered into the debate on a concoction of traditional and modernity and liberally borrowed elements from various sources, which they transferred into their theatre, a process which was termed as “alchemy” by K.V. Akshara in his essay ‘The Dreams of Kannada Theatre’ (Akshara 130).

Not being ritualistic like the traditional drama or experimental like the contemporary theatre, Surabhi theatres, with its primary aim to entertain its audience and cater to popular taste traversed on the middle path. Surabhi theatres for the past 100 years have continually practiced theatre. Surabhi theatres responded to the concerns of contemporary theatre in the following ways:

1. **Cultural policy**: With no governmental policy to bank upon, Surabhi had over the years earned the patronage of its spectators. Theatre being their
livelihood, Surabhi artists earnestly endeavored to improve their production to suit the popular sensibilities. Their theatre policy was defined by their founders and ancestors, who pursued their puppeteering tradition in providing quality entertainment to the people who patronized them. To achieve this end the Surabhi artists, invested on hiring eminent playwrights to write plays that befitted a Surabhi production. Investments were made on latest equipment, gadgets and sets to enhance their plays and thereby draw audience.

2. **Space:** Surabhi theatre had created its own performance space by setting camps and erecting their own collapsible stage, carrying their own equipment and touring different regions. Well equipped and self-reliant these companies took theatre to the people. With the intervention of cinema in 1930s they left the towns and moved to rural centers to find alternatives.

3. **Audience:** Surabhi theatres did not interact with the audience during theatre festivals or annual religious festivals. Surabhi audience came for entertainment. They enjoyed the plots from the mythologies, histories and folk narratives which were interceded with songs, verse and dances. The elaborate settings, the lights and the tricks provided them with a wholesome entertainment.

4. **Plays:** Surabhi plays were highly creative. The plots taken from myths, and folk narratives were popular with the audience. Though eminent playwrights were invited to write their scripts, the Surabhi managers preferred plots from the mythologies, and local legends as the story lines were familiar and provided a lived experience by suggesting multiple interpretations. In addition, the plays in this tradition are always contemporary as the interpretative performance is
always of the present and is open to present context and history. Timely improvisations in characterization, lighting, music, and tricks help in retaining the novelty of the plays.

Critics have argued that Surabhi theatres in their eagerness to please their spectators had brought a commercial angle to the stage. But it cannot be ignored, that a play is staged for the spectators.

Future of Surabhi

The present generation of Surabhi artists may continue doing theatre. But for the younger generation which is attracted to other mass media, the Surabhi theatre offers no illuminating future. With the disintegration of the families, Surabhi’s closure appeared inevitable. However the recent recognitions by the central and state governments have raised the hopes among Surabhi artists. With help of few well-wishers Surabhi theatres have requested the government of Andhra Pradesh to allot a piece of land in the outskirts of Hyderabad, whereby they can establish a cultural centre along with their living quarters.

Aware of the diminishing popularity in an era dominated by electronic media, Surabhi theatres, is looking at new possibilities to ensure their theatre is a ‘living tradition’ and does not become fossilized. The younger generation is working on documenting and creating archives by

- Promoting research: Many Surabhi artists are pursuing research in the field of performing arts.
• Organising photo exhibitions: Photo exhibition depicting the evolution of Surabhi theatres from 1900s and the various stage equipment used in the past is being regularly held in Lalitha Kala Thoranam, Hyderabad.

• Participating in national and international theatre festivals: Surabhi theatres in the past decade have participated in various theatre festivals in India and abroad, including one in France in 2013.

• Appeal to be included as a course in University: A strong appeal has been made to the ministry to include ‘Surabhi Theatres’ as a diploma course in the departments of performing arts in the Telugu University.

• Identifying potential funding agencies: The Surabhi Company is exploring various opportunities for sponsors to support their venture to construct an organization in the outskirts of Hyderabad.

Historiography of Indian theatre is classified by the three-part model of Sanskrit/Classical theatre; the folk and popular traditions of the medieval period and Modern theatre with its beginnings in the colonial encounter. Each aspect of Indian theatre is a means to reflect, affirm, question and contest the socio-cultural milieu of its inception.

Indian performance tradition occupies the space between classical ‘dance’ forms and western notions of realistic ‘theatre’. Traditional theatrical performances elaborate epic and puranic literature through the performance aesthetics that are set down in Natya Sastra or other manuals of performance. They are marked by a plurality of linguistic, cultural and generic traditions. The three broad categories of performance forms are Classical, Popular-folk and Modern. Performance in India
has evolved through the traditions of narrative, ritual, realism, cultural resistance and expression. The classical and popular forms influence modern theatrical performances which have expanded the scope of classical and popular themes and forms.

Modern Indian theatre had its beginnings in the urban centers of British power—Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. When the British brought their own strong theatre tradition to the colonial administrative and commercial centers, many of the more anglicized literary elite in the cities of India quickly took to Shakespeare and contemporary English drama. By the nineteenth century a series of playwrights and theatrical troupes developed a unique amalgamation of Western proscenium theatre and different regional traditions of Indian popular folk opera.

Indian theatre of the post-independence period has defied post-colonial framework to either explain or interpret the new cultural forms that have emerged during colonial regime. The difficulty in historicizing ‘Indian theatre’ has been attributed by scholars to the obscurity that lies in the linguistic plurality of Indian theatrical practices.

The modern urban theatre epitomized the conditions of colonial dominance by borrowing its organizational structures, textual features and performance conventions and combines them with traditional and popular indigenous genres. On the other hand the rural and semi-rural theatres quickly absorbed the material and the ideological structure of the modern entrepreneurial touring theatre companies and established their own theatre groups in their respective regions.
A fragmentary, neo-orientalist approach by modern scholars has prevented any systematic recognition of the post-independence theatre. The Sangeet Nataka Akademi’s Drama Seminar in 1956 marked the symbolic end to the theatre of the 1940s. This seminar attempted to relate the complex classical and pre-colonial legacy in theatre to the aesthetic, social and political needs of the new nation and to develop a programme for ‘the future Indian drama’. The seminar initiated the pan-Indian vision of tradition which incorporated the following axioms:

i. There is a continuous, all inclusive theatre tradition in India, beginning from *Natya Sastra* reaching up to the contemporary theatre.

ii. The unity of this tradition can be proved by discovering common principles and techniques and by creating a common vocabulary to explain them.

iii. This Indian theatre is different from its other, the western theatre tradition.

iv. This tradition which is almost extinct needs to be cleansed, renovated and preserved.

The 1956 seminar repudiated the westernized theatre as an ‘alien’ imposition that did not and cannot flourish in India and post-colonial deliberations by cultural nationalist theorists offered the best opportunity for correcting this aberration. Mulk Raj Anand’s declaration that post-independence Indian theatre was a ‘clean slate’ on which contemporary theatre practitioners can devise their own style was challenged by later anti traditional critics.
The cultural nationalist saw the colonial modernistic theatre as a “desert of imitation” and as opposed to all the habits of representation and spectatorship that were most suited to Indian culture” (Dharwadker137). This view received ideological support from the disillusionment with the western theatre of realism. Further the interventions of Brecht’s epic theatre which demonstrated the superiority of the anti-Aristotelian aesthetic of traditional Indian theatre over western forms along with intercultural experiments of Western scholarship successfully marginalized the popular modern colonial theatre as a “practice which disrupted an indigenous theatrical tradition” (Jain 65) and gradually changed the counters of our dramatic activity at all levels.

The post-independence theorists attack on modern colonial theatre as a destructive force on indigenous forms could be analyzed under different categories.

1. **Continued existence of Classical forms**: Historians have traced the decline of classical forms to the 10th century folk forms which were a vibrant form seeped deep in the communal life of the people. Therefore the westernized theatre forms emerged at a time when classical forms had given way to post classical folk forms.

2. **Critique on indigenous forms**: Nandi Bhatia points out in her book Acts of Authority/Acts of Resistance that the “the British were contemptuous of the hybridization of the plays for contaminating the ‘essential’ qualities of their culture” (Bhatia 16). Indigenous forms came under attack because of the self-critical social reforms movements, the emergence of the middle-class cultures and the commitment of major authors like Bharatendu
Harishchandra, Rabindranath Tagore and D. L Roy to the literary and cultural possibilities of the new aesthetic (Dharwadker 141).

3. **Indigenous theatrical forms had to contest with the modern Westernized urban theatre:** The Urban modern theatre was different from the traditional theatre. The folk theatre was ritualistic and catered to the rural audience while the modern theatre was the product of entrepreneurial capitalism catering to the newly emerged, educated middle class.

4. **The identity concerns:** The modern theatre in the process of its evolution and indigenization had invented a new identity for itself, which was essentially a concept of hybridity of Sanskrit revivalism and Westernization.

Colonial Indian theatre, is marked by the negotiation of the necessary hetrogenetity, using a concept of identity that exists through differences and hybridity illustrating one of the basic claims of post-colonial literary criticism that the “colonial cultures generate new theatrical forms by negotiating between indigenous performances modes and imported imperial cultural” (qtd. in Dharwadker 143). The popular culture performances which emerged between 1870 and 1930 paved way for the first and only national level professional theatre in the country, which later in 1930s merged with that ‘quintessentially Indian’ mass media – film.

Therefore the cultural- nationalists and post- independent theorist need not underscore the colonial theatre as a record of hegemonic imposition by the British or as the cultural betrayal by the Indian practitioners (144).
The study attempts to affirm that the post-colonial circumstance alters the conditions of both appropriation and resistance. Post-independence writers in the Indian language have approached the issue of western influence as a conscious move towards “internationalism and cosmopolitism” (Dharwadker 134). Many writers have considered the issue of origin and influences as irrelevant to literary production and have articulated that writers can use certain international forms to appreciate the changes they make along or against their particular literary traditions.

Indian literary historians do not distinguish between pre and post-independence periods. Post independent novelists and poets reject pre-independence writers on the basis of their modernity and not because they are influenced by the West. On the contrary, an Indian cultural-nationalist argument about drama, theatre, and performance after 1947 is based on the perceived relation of the colonial to the pre-colonial. The theatre of the independent India was a ‘post-colonial’ cultural formation shaped by historically new conditions of writing, performance and reception (Dharwadker 135).

The print culture in India, also a product of modernity, facilitated the creation of a range of new poetic, fictional, non-fictional, and discursive genres that had no identifiable precursors in pre-colonial writing. In contrast, the modern Westernized culture of realistic, secular, and commercial urban performance disrupted and displaced indigenous theatrical traditions that had developed continuously for nearly two millennia. The new Western aesthetic of production and representation compelled the highly developed anti-realistic cultural forms to accommodate realism (Dharwadker 135).
A Study on professional theatre which developed during the most effervescent period of the colonial rule complements the historiography of the modern Indian theatre. Professional commercial theatre has been marginalized by the cultural nationalist as it was relegated to the entertainment industry which seeks to attract patronage and therefore desires profit.

Theatre which is as old as the human community and which has emerged as religio-civic ritual is always entertainment, but in its most creative movements it is also an imaginative space in which it explores the human, social and political qualities of the period. History has taught us, that when theatre becomes too much of a trivial fashion of a leisure class, new forms of theatre emerge around the periphery to revitalize the dramatic experience and bring it back closer to life of the community. Cultural space that bridges the utopian idealism and the realisms of everyday struggles alone can ensure survival and growth of cultures. Drama ‘is the cultural space’ in which actors symbolically represent the struggles of the community but in a form that provides entertainment. K. V. Subbanna, founder member of Ninasam, reiterates the significance of a communitarian platform for the growth of a mature theatre. “You can speak to an audience, but your intimacies can be shared only with a community through homogeneity of culture” (124).

Theatre in India has never been professional in the true sense of the word. Artists associated with the production and presentations of theatre have not been entirely dependent on it for their livelihood. It has always been a passion, at best a vocation but scarcely a profession. Theatre in India has never been an uninterrupted activity, being performed as part of festivals or such other occasions. Even the professional theatre groups perform for about six to eight months a year. During
the rest of the year, the people remain engaged either in agriculture or other vocations. Involved in some occupation during daytime they convene in the evenings to rehearse or perform. But with India moving away from agrarian economy, people comprehend that more time has to be spent on a daily basis to earn their livelihood. Theatre on the contrary has become more demanding in terms of skill-level and requires artists to invest more time and energy.

This divergence could be resolved if the theatre persons earn their livelihood through theatre. This could be done in two ways. One, by state sponsorship and two, by making people pay directly. Either way, predicts trouble for the professional theatre groups. If the State sponsors theatre, there is an apprehension of the State appropriating the creative freedom of theatre and using it for its own purpose. On the other hand, if theatre is made to survive on the money raised from the audience, there would come up the question relating to the aesthetics. When theatre has to survive on money collected from the viewers, the obvious aim is to gather more audience. The easiest way to achieve that is to cater to the ‘want’ of audience. Accordingly the traditionalists saw commercial theatres as a financial venture whereby traditional conventions and artistic sensibilities of theatre were compromised to entice the audience. Condemned as a “fit thing for the market place”, the Commercial theatres, however, by combining in varying degrees, different aspects in performance styles and repertories, established an identity for itself.

The majority of arts and culture production in India consists of small and medium non-profit enterprises, registered as trusts or societies. Research findings show that these enterprises are characterized by their economic ‘precarity’. With the
soaring production costs, these artists are an important constituency that the cultural policy needs to focus on. While the folk artist who is seen as representing the Indian heritage enjoy state support, the performers within non-traditional forms of cultural production do not come under the shelter of the nation’s cultural policy.

The new theatre, that emerged in the end of the nineteenth century, through intelligent negotiation with the agents of global economics and local culture and tradition interspersed with anti-colonial resistance employed hybridized plotlines, acting conventions, and production methods and had claimed for itself European modernity, ancient historical roots, vibrant vernacular performance traditions, and a self-assertive nationalist present. This ‘hybrid’ modern theatre, by combining in varying degrees of synthesis, had established the identity of the national theatre and merits acknowledgment as an important phase in the theatre history of India.

This thesis reiterates the pivotal role played by the early modern professional theatre during the early decades of the twentieth century- a role that both Western and Indian theatre historiographies have failed to fully document, analyze, or appreciate.

With an objective to achieve cultural autonomy and wholeness, theatre practitioners of the post-independent India attempted to define Indian theatre by incorporating a pristine pre-colonial past into the post-colonial present. Accordingly, Indian theatre was seen as a continuum beginning from the vedic period to the present, which was mediated by the colonial machinery of the nineteenth century and the immediate requisite was to restore and preserve this tradition. However recent theories have contested this view of ‘continuous theatre
tradition’ and have demonstrated that the colonial theatres, that emerged in the end of the nineteenth century, provided a very important space, “for hegemonic contest among dominant and powerful sections of society” (Singh vi), needs to be studied and included in the historiography of Indian theatre.

The twentieth century has experienced an enormous diversity of views on theatres and performances. Scholars have acknowledged the difficulty of attempting a comprehensive study on Indian theatre which exists in its complex and innumerable forms. The difficulty in developing a single definition to modern Indian theatre, in Bhatia’s words is that, “it is not linked to a particular period but to a style that combines elements of ‘traditional and European, classical and, folk and ritualistic and rural and urban forms and practice’ (xiv) and is characterized by overlapping colonialist, nationalist and modernist interpretations.

Any serious definitions of post-independence India’s theatre scene has to recognize the presence of the various kinds of theatre activities, which were shaped by factors like region, language, economic status and consequent needs of the audience, and have existed, in the rural and semi-rural pockets during the early decades of the twentieth century. As Dilip Kumar Basu states any ‘Indianess’ in this country’s playwriting and stage-presentations has to be first involved with local concerns, before it can telescope on wider human concerns’ (Basu, 23).

Theatre India, the journal of National School of Drama, in 2000 attempted in an article, ‘Makers of Contemporary Indian Theatre’, a cataloguing exercise of names of theatre practices and approaches to develop the definition of modern Indian theatre. The complexity of the task generated debates on the term ‘makers’ as
it involved not just playwrights and directors but also other stakeholders of not just one theatre but all forms of theatre.

Indian theatre, in various languages has become a “phenomenon of contemporaneity”. The new perspective recognizes theatre as a collective art, a social business and the first democratic art-form which has gone “beyond hierarchy” (Desshpande 10). Moving away from divinity the modern playwright/Director is “interested in keeping to the human levels, which is a distinctly new phenomenon in arts” (10).

The contribution of the commercial theatres in establishing the national idiom was not recognized by the traditionalists, who saw commercial theatres as a financial venture whereby traditional conventions and artistic sensibilities of theatre were compromised to entice the audience. The pre-independence anti modernist scholar, Bharatendu Harischandra, who is regarded the father of the modern Hindi drama, condemned the commercial performances as the drama “devoid of true poetry”, and therefore classified them as the “corrupt forms” (qtd. In Dharwadker 56).

The historical background upon which Surabhi theatres originated and developed has been dealt with in the preceding chapters which recount the pioneering efforts of the Surabhi ancestors who at the precise time shifted from puppeteering to stage performance. Through constant experimentation and improvisation the Surabhi group developed an idiom for itself and established as the pioneers of the modern theatre movement in Andhra. Chapter III delineated the performance strategies evolved by the Surabhi artists and studied their commitment to provide quality entertainment. Surabhi theatres’ repertoire exhibited variety of plays which could be categorized under the captions of mythology, history and folk.
The characteristic features of Surabhi theatres have been described in chapter IV, wherein the professional expertise of the Surabhi production is depicted. The expertise exhibited by the Surabhi artists indicates that theatre for them was not just their livelihood. Very professional in their attitude both on stage and off stage, they represent a group of skilled artists of India who have thoroughly understood the community in which they live and their responsibility to this community as an artist. It is this understanding of their position fostered along with their inherited values that had helped them to survive.

This study of Surabhi theatres confirms the strategic position of the Company dramas which flourished in the 1920s and 1930s during the most tumultuous period of the nation’s history. The argument of the post-independence scholars that the modern westernized theatre was an ‘alien imposition’ which disrupted the indigenous theatrical tradition and offered “nothing of lasting value” (Dharwadker 136) needs to be questioned. The present study has posited to demystify the myth of modern urban theatre as an aesthetically alien, politically complicit, and culturally insignificant form by revealing the variance with literary, theatrical, and political history.

**Conclusion**

The nationalists and the cultural critics of the post-independence period in their eagerness to establish the identity of the new nation marginalized the commercial company drama relegating it to corrupt forms. This led to the revival of ancient classical and folk forms. The directors and the playwrights of the 1960s in their enthusiasm to define and be a part of the modern Indian theatre embarked on the syncretic theatre which amalgamated the traditional, classical and western forms. This movement encouraged the development of various theatres including the street
theatre, absurd theatre, essential theatre and woman’s theatre. State sponsored conferences and festivals celebrated the native folk, classical Sanskrit drama, experiments of the urban syncretic theatre and in the recent years the creative alternate theatre.

The conference that was organized in 2008 at Heggodu, Karnataka with an agenda “to historicize our current theatrical practices” consciously excluded the professional commercial theatre. The few studies on regional commercial forms (Nautanki, Lavani) were seen as experimental in nature and were not included into the conventional critical studies.

The present study on Surabhi theatres is an attempt to restore the professional company dramas of the colonial period to its legitimate position in the historiography of theatre in India. This study would like to emphasise that commercial theatre ought not to be referred to as ‘alien’ as it incorporated various indigenous elements. Cultural scholars of the post-independence period cannot assume that colonial theatre was a ‘sterile’ ground on which no worthy theatrical experience could have generated. An Indian tradition that excludes and ignores colonial intervention will only indulge in an act of historical falsification or present a sign of “narrow chauvinistic patriotism” (Chatterjee 129). Furthermore, in a society that is caught inexorably in the processes of modernization, one cannot reject some forms of modernity while tacitly embracing other. Therefore serious research on the different features of the company dramas should be encouraged to record the colonial influences on the Indian art and culture.

The multifarious nature of the Indian theatre has to be recognized and celebrated. Every form, whether existing or dwindling, has to be studied and included in the writing of the history of Indian theatre. The plurality of the linguistic
and theatrical idiom should be documented for future research. “Each mode is uniquely important. There are several, equally valid and legitimate Indian theatres” (Deshpande 1999: 93). To compress these to the categories of folk, classical and modern Western is to deny the very history of modern Indian theatre. Finally, the real test of a theatre lay in the artist’s ability to communicate with audiences and audiences’ receptivity to the presentation, and commercial theatres of the pre-Independence India had successfully communed with people and had developed a lively theatre culture.
Notes

1. Socio political conditions of the 1960s: War with China in 1962, and with Pakistan in 1965 and the death of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964 instigated various political issues. In 1966 large part of rural India was gripped by food scarcity, which was followed by an industrial recession. Rural unrest exploded into armed uprising of poor peasants under the leadership of the communist party of India that spread within a few years from Naxalbari in the north-eastern corner of West Bengal in 1967 to other parts of the Indian countryside, as far as Andhra Pradesh villagers in the South. As it developed into a full-fledged movement by the 1970s, its impact was felt on the cultural scene.

2. Nat Sankirtana is a classical Manipuri performance form which includes ritual singing, drumming and dancing.

3. Ninasam is a cultural organisation located in the village of Heggodu in Sagar Taluk of the Shivamogga District in the state of Karnataka, India. Ninasam is the short form of Sri Nilakanteshwara Natyaseva Samgha, an organisation dedicated to the growth of drama, films and publishing. Ninasam was the brainchild of the renowned dramatist and Magsaysay award winner, K V Subbanna. It is currently headed by K V Akshara, the son of Subbanna.