



Chapter 2

Literature Review

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A theatre, a literature, an artistic expression that does not speak for its own time has no relevance.

Dario Fo (Nobel Lecture)

2.0 Introduction

The topic of the present research, 'Celebrating Protest and Performing Resistance: Political and Cultural Constructs in Select Plays of Dario Fo', involves a critical analysis of Dario Fo's select plays exploring the elements of protest, resistance, politics, and culture, an ensemble of Fo's theatrical credo. In order to understand these dimensions in Fo's theatre the present chapter attempts a literature survey which is not confined only to Fo's concept of theatre as a political and cultural medium of protest, but also gives a wider understanding of theatre as a political and cultural activity in the light of Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony.

Art is an umbrella term incorporating a wide range of human activities or artistic endeavours into its ambit which has diverse functions to play. Although, the conventional notion of art especially literature, is to provide aesthetic pleasure or to delight people, its social and didactic purpose cannot be denied. Realising the social utility of art, artists used it as a tool to improve social structure, to spread social awareness and to transform society as a whole. They do not imagine art divorced from life and society thus, support the aphorism, 'art for society's sake'. As Plekhanov expounds, "The belief in art for art's sake arises and takes root wherever people engaged in art are hopelessly out of harmony with their social environment" (36). He affirms that art is inextricably linked to its social environment. According to Ruskin, "The art of any country is the exponent of its social and political virtues. The art, or general productive and formative energy, of any country, is an exact exponent of its ethical life" (8). This account of Ruskin reinforces the idea that art is a reflection of the socio-political milieu of the given society it emanates from. The objective of this argument is to demonstrate the social relevance of art and its active involvement in social and political struggles of the human race. The struggles of the inter-war and

post-war period, the Socialist Revolution as well as the agitational movements of the late sixties highly politicised art.

Theatre, considered to be the most public and social art form, has been effectively used as an instrument for social change. It is deeply rooted in the socio-political and cultural life of a society. Theatre existed in all the societies in one form or the other, resulting in a myriad of theatrical forms. The purpose of this variety of theatrical experiences was not just to amuse the audiences but also a reflection of different social issues and concerns, specific to a particular community and culture. From the very beginning, human existence has been an ongoing struggle for stability, power, meaning and identity and theatre has actively and loudly participated in this continuous struggle for survival. Theatre has been used as a tool for cultural and political dominance as well as an alternative and counter-cultural practice to challenge this sovereignty. The tradition of protest through theatre or theatrical protest goes hand in hand with the origin of theatre and theatrical performances. In every age there have been playwrights who expressed their feelings of discontent and disagreement with the status quo thus, came into direct conflict with the existing authority. They found it a potent medium to instil awareness in the masses by projecting the malpractices of the unjust social and political system and to inspire social change. Considering the efficacy of dramatic performances the authorities delineated Censorship Law which acted as a sentinel to supervise theatrical events. The dramatists were asked to submit the script of the play to the board before the performance. The board had the right to make changes in the script and to decide what should be performed and what should be avoided, resulting in the ban, imprisonment, and exile of the dramatists. In some extreme cases, they were even sentenced with corporal punishment.

Although there has been the convention of protest through theatre there was no established form of Protest Theatre. 'The Political and Protest Theatre' is a recent phenomenon. The World War II saw the proliferation of new social and political issues which attracted the attention of academicians, artists and social reformers who looked for novel ways to speak about these new problems. This was the case with drama as well. Theatre artists of the period explored new forms and techniques to deal with new subject matters. They opposed the Aristotelian aesthetics of drama and introduced new aesthetics of theatre to discuss current issues and to achieve

contemporary relevance. For instance, Bertolt Brecht's 'Epic Theatre', Augusto Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed', Jerzy Grotowski's 'Poor Theatre', Samuel Beckett's 'Theatre of the Absurd' and Antonin Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty' are worth mentions. Theatre has been used to address the issues of religion, caste, class, race, gender, and other social and political discourses like culture, identity, nationalism, and colonialism, a wide array of subjects ranging from domestic problems to the issues of national and international interest.

The cataclysm of the post-War period profoundly affected the writings of the period and propelled the dramatists to take up the issue very seriously. Up till the nineteenth-century drama in the West closely observed the Greek dramaturgical structures. But the playwrights of the modern and postmodern period opposed the Aristotelian concept of theatre and developed new theories of theatre. There is a sense of opposition, alienation, and violation in their style. It was for the first time in the history of theatre that the audience was given due importance. Though the audience has been an integral part of the performance and will always remain so, but in the Aristotelian paradigm of theatre and drama, the spectator was transformed into a passive observer. He did not actively participate in the action of the play thus, was isolated from the mainstream action. However, the dramatists of the post-War period redefined the role of the spectator. Now, he is no more a detached observer who stands aloof from the action of the play rather vigorously participates in the performative events and contributes to the construction of meaning in the performance. Other post-war developments in the field of drama are; the breaking of the fourth wall, experimentation with the form and the content, emergence of new theatre theories and the authoritative role of the director. Shaw, Ibsen, Chekov, Strindberg, Zola, Artaud, Sartre, Martin Eslyn, Beckett, Stanislavsky, Brecht, Grotowski, and Boal are the few names who made a distinctive contribution in changing the theatrical experiences in the modern and postmodern era and whose theories of drama opened up a new discourse in theatre. The explosion of new social and political issues in the twentieth century and the extensive demand of socio-political reform compelled the theatre artists to discover new techniques to accommodate new subjects as the old form was inefficient to address those new topics. The Student's Movement, the Worker's Movement, the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement influenced much of the

dramatic writings of the 1960s and the 1970s. The post-war period is recorded as the most turbulent period in world history and much of the literature of the period has been characterized by these social and political upheavals, with theatre being no exception. The theatre in the post-war period extensively contributes to the ongoing struggle for justice, equality, and liberty. One of the most common threads found in the writings of the age is the theme of protest. This has been the prime concern of theatre and gave birth to a new dramatic form, the Theatre of Protest. This new form of theatre has been very popular in the 1960s and 1970s and often partakes in the revolutionary and radical movements of the period. The term is often interchangeably used with Political Theatre.

This new form of theatre is used as an expression of the dissatisfaction of people with the contemporary socio-political structure of the society, the widespread inequality, injustice and the gross violation of people's democratic rights by the hegemonic forces. Protest Theatre is primarily concerned with day to day issues and problems which require immediate attention to be fixed. It does not merely oppose the existing condition, expose the hypocrisy of the system, give voice to the grievances of the people and instil awareness in them but also aims at social and political change by encouraging them to action. It acquires a different meaning in different context. Even though Protest Theatre is used as a synonym of the Political Theatre, they should not be confused with each other because there is a slight difference between the two. Protest Theatre has a broader implication and never supports the regime while Political Theatre may oppose as well as support it.

Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, Wole Soyinka, Amiri Baraka, Tennessee Williams, Caryl Churchill, Sue-Ellen Case, Elaine Aston, Megan Terry, Mark Ravenhill, Dario Fo, Derek Walcott, Drew Hayden Taylor, George Ryga, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Utpal Dutt, Mahasweta Devi and Safdar Hashmi have been the major exponents of Theatre of Protest. Protest Theatre has often been accused as a Left-wing theatre but this allegation has no validity because this tradition dates back to the satirical comedies of Aristophanes even before the birth of Communism, projecting the struggle of the underprivileged section and protesting against their unjustified exploitation. Although earlier there was no well-defined category of Protest Theatre, the tradition of protest through theatre is centuries old.

The theatre of Dario Fo is inextricably linked to contemporary Italian politics and culture and enthusiastically engages with the local issues and problems. He is an aberration among contemporary political playwrights and a deviation from the norm who is not rigid to a particular technique or style but displays variety and flexibility in his art that distinguishes him from other playwrights whose works have been categorised as 'Political Theatre'. He stands out as an eminent cultural icon, a distinguished actor, director and playwright renowned for his fidelity to illegitimate and popular modes of theatre. He used old forms to deal with new themes. Thematically his work is modern but structurally he is a traditionalist because of his allegiance to the theatrical system practiced by *Giullare* (medieval itinerant performer), Harlequin of the Commedia dell Arte, Ruzzante and Moliere. His work is a brilliant combination of mime, pantomime, farce, storytelling and political satire. He largely depends on physical actions to produce laughter in his plays because he believed in its capability to evoke critical thinking in the spectators. His theatre incorporates many elements from oral performance tradition, for instance, the art of improvisation, story-telling, use of dialect, jugglery, grotesque humour and other carnivalesque features. As, Antonio Scuderi notes, "Clowning, puppets, and the slapstick, visual gags and theatrical devices of variety theatre abound in Fo's plays" (65). According to Robert Scanlan, "His work in the theatre, both as a brilliant improvisational raconteur and, more conventionally, as a comic playwright, has consistently followed the forms of the *Fabulatori* and cantastorie from whom he learned his craft" (98). At another place, Scanlan speaks, "This prodigiously talented comedian is indeed the Moliere of our time- or as Fo prefers to have it, the Ruzzante of the twentieth century" (99). Fo was honoured with Noble Prize in 1997 for his vibrant theatrical activism and for his relentless attempt to validate and to restore the culture and dignity of the downtrodden. He never misses an opportunity to ridicule the authorities (religious as well as the state). Tony Mitchell rightly points out, "Fo's 1997 Nobel Prize was an acknowledgment that he has succeeded in his satirical fight for democracy against all forms of oppression in Italy and elsewhere in the world" (xxi). He has been the consistent performer who performed not only to amuse the audiences but there is a serious political note underlying his comic performances. Scanlan points out:

This self-styled jester –a man who is arguably the funniest performer of the second half of the twentieth century (if the first half is conceded to Charlie Chaplin) –has also been the most consistently political European playwright since Bertolt Brecht. (97)

The theories of popular culture, organic intellectual and hegemony propounded by the famous Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci determined to a greater extent the political and revolutionary structure of Fo's plays. It was under his immense influence that Fo decided to recover people's culture and their language which he supposed was stolen by the elite class and appropriated by them to suit their own purposes. He used theatre as a weapon to lampoon the power figures and to uphold the dignity of the underdogs. He is inarguably anti-establishment and representative of the working class. His antagonistic ideas made him the most notorious as well the most renowned person in contemporary Italy. His criticism of the power figures (political and religious) turned them hostile against him and his determination to fight the injustice and corruption earned him a wider audience which mainly constitutes of the working class. The theatrical career of Dario Fo has spanned over the period of fifty years, starting from the early sixties to the later part of the twentieth century. Throughout all these years Fo has been very active to concentrate on important issues like power, corruption, hypocrisy, injustice, inequality, history, politics religion and culture, a wide range of themes.

A considerable amount of critical works exist on Dario Fo and different scholars have approached him in a different manner. The survey undertaken in this chapter is supplemented with two range of materials; the critical books and the research article written on Fo and his theatre.

2.1 Secondary Materials on Dario Fo (Books)

Antonio Scuderi is an important critic of Dario Fo. He has produced some major critical texts as well as scholarly articles on him. His work, *Dario Fo and Popular Performance* (1998) lays emphasis on Fo's undeterred commitment to European popular performance traditions. The present study traces the influences of *Giullari*, *Fabulatori*, puppetry, Harlequin and the figure of Zanni that were instrumental in the development of Fo's theatrical praxis. It illustrates that how Dario Fo has adapted different modes and techniques of medieval theatre which were generally considered

as the second rate and elevated it “To the level of literary prestige and has helped in redefining the concept of “literature” to comprehend oral tradition and performance” (Scuderi 37). His obligation to oral performance traditions clarifies his position as the champion of the popular culture which in turn signifies his theatrical politics of popular versus official culture. Gramsci’s notion of revolutionizing the working class culture has been the guiding factor in the the formation of his militant and oppositional theatre. Fo argues that working-class culture has been robbed by the rich and was presented back to them as inferior in order to perpetuate the upper-class hegemony over the poor and the illiterate. Fo reiterates that it is the duty of the intellectuals to break the hegemony of the cultural superiority of the dominant class and to raise the consciousness of the working class by making them aware of their own culture and traditions. And his reworking of the popular performance traditions clearly defines the politics of his theatre.

Another significant work of Scuderi which may be considered the extension of his previous work is, *Framing, Festival, and the Folkloric Imagination* (2013). It provides useful insights into Fo’s poetics of theatre. He has provided folkloric and anthropological interpretations of Dario Fo’s theatre. He has discussed at length that how these folkloric, and carnivalesque features supply an interactive and interpretive framework for his theatre and establish him as the modern-day *Giullare*. He has explained that his agitational and militant theatre is not constituted only by everyday politics but is stimulated by the European carnival culture that makes him the most popular and widely performed playwright across the world. His emphasis is on three interrelated aspects which constitute his theatre. One is the interconnectedness of significant themes. Second is a fictional presentation of historical facts or representation of history. Third, his representation of social, political and historical issues is activated by the European carnival culture. Scuderi explains:

His theatre is a microcosm, based on a world according to Fo, defined by a struggle between popular and official cultures. This microcosm exists in a carnivalesque liminality, where world order is suspended, and he blurs the line between fact and fiction. (02)

The book explores the interrelationship of various techniques and methodologies borrowed by Fo from the oral traditions to deal with complex issues of politics, history, and culture.

David L. Hirst's *Dario Fo and Franca Rame* (1989) analyses some of the major texts of Fo and Rame including the satirical farces and the monologues. While his satirical farces give insights into specific political events, his *Giullarate* are steeped in history and tradition. The purpose of his monologues is to desecrate the official history and to present it from people's point of view. The book traces the relevance of their theatre in the social and political context of contemporary Italy. It also takes into consideration the nuances of translation and adaptation of their works into English. He argues that it is difficult to adapt and translate their works into English because of their diverse context, multiple viewpoints, immediacy, language and ever-evolving text. Hirst does not place him into the category of universal writer, he says, "Fo's dramas were inspired by and reflect very specific events and issues, divorced from which they become empty essays in style: he is the opposite of a universal writer" (30-31).

Dario Fo: People's Court Jester (1999) by Tony Mitchell is the first full-length study of Dario Fo and his theatrical activism. It offers a detailed chronological account of Fo and Rame's turbulent theatrical and political life starting from their brief stint as television actors, their revolutionary period of the sixties and seventies to Fo being awarded the Noble Prize. It is not only confined to the biographical chronicling of events but also informs about various techniques Fo incorporates in his drama, his political dynamism of the past fifty years and his yearning to revive the traditions of popular theatre which has been so far the trademark of Fovian theatre. His reproduction of the popular irreverent comedies has been the trendsetter of a new European comic tradition. He used his farcical and iconoclastic comedies as a tool to oppose all kinds of oppression and exploitation. It also gives a chronology of his works and highlights the problems of translating and adapting Fo for the English audiences. Mitchell dismisses any approach to analyse their writings in the light of modern or postmodern theories that according to him will be of little or no help to comprehend them.

Dario Fo and Franca Rame: Harlequins of the Revolution (2001) by Joseph Farrell is yet another attempt at offering the biography of Dario Fo and Franca Rame. It gives the full account of Fo and Rame's involvement in theatre and politics. It tells about their achievements in theatre which have been a tour de force in Italy in the nineteen sixties and seventies and the motivation behind their active participation in

the socio-political campaign of the period. He has given justifications for their indomitable yearning to draw extensively from popular performance tradition and to rework them in a modern context in order to develop their unique and powerful Political Theatre. Apart from sketching the theatrical careers of Fo and Rame Farrell has also tried to explain the political instability of the post-war Italy which had formed the basis of their revolutionary theatre closely tied to the headlines of the day. He further elaborates that the revolution they preached has nothing to do with bloodshed but dissent against injustice, corruption and the man's inhumanity to man.

Tom Behan's *Dario Fo: Revolutionary Theatre* (2000) is a political biography of Fo exemplifying his approach to contemporary Italian politics. Albeit, Fo is known for his progressive and Left Wing ideology he has never been a cardholder of the party. His popularity chiefly rests on his allegiance with the working class struggle which is the major thrust of his agitational theatre and his political outlook. The main motto of his theatrical praxis is to give voice to the subalterns and to retrieve their culture. Behan has analysed the three most important plays of Fo which have a strong political base and define his position as a political playwright. Though they may differ in their political content they are a response to the prevailing political climate in Italy. Hirst rightly observes, "Fo has always been the most sensitive barometer of the political climate in his country, a shrewd critic perfectly attuned to the issues of the day" (160). His theatre is a fine balance between art and politics. He used theatre as a vehicle for the expression of his political ideas and his comment on the Italian bureaucracy and consumerist culture.

Dario Fo: Stage, Text and Tradition (2000), edited by Antonio Scuderi and Joseph Farrell is a collection of eleven scholarly articles, examining various aspects of Fo's theatre that help to identify and establish the poetics of his theatre. While some of the articles focus on the acting skills of Fo, central to his particular brand of improvised theatre others trace the ingenuity of his theatre traceable to the rich oral performance traditions. This is actually an effort to synthesize the revolutionary views of Fo with his outmoded theatrical praxis which Valeri calls, "Dialectics of opposites" (19). "His work involves a dialectic between the past and the present. In theatrical practice, in his poetics, Fo is the reverse of an iconoclast" (Scuderi, Farrell 10).

The first article of the book by Walter Valeri stressed the actor-based approach of Fo's theatre which is linked to the Italian tradition of an actor's theatre, going a long way back to Plautus. This great tradition of an actor's theatre is continued with the sixteenth-century actor-playwright Ruzzante to the twentieth-century masters of the Italian stage Eduardo De Filippo and Dario Fo. Dario Fo is not merely an author, he is an actor, storyteller, director and producer who remains at the centre of the performance controlling all the other events associated with it. He prefers performance over text allowing the audience to participate in the performative events and changes it according to the audience's responses that is why his performance is in continuous process evolving with each performance. He does not identify himself with the character he is playing by interrupting and digressing in the middle of the performance assuming a social function to represent the outside reality.

The second article by Ron Jenkins renders his experiences as a translator and interpreter of Fo. He points out that translating Fo is in itself an act of performance because of the language, gesture, precision, fluidity and rhythmic structure of his performance. He also claims that it is pointless to expect that nothing will be lost or changed while translating Fo. He states, "Translating Fo's plays is all a question of balance, of equilibrium, and dynamics" (38).

The third article by Antonio Scuderi places Fo in the great Italian tradition of popular theatre which provided him not only with the contextual framework but also with important dramatic techniques and modes of expression. In this article, he has focused on two significant elements of medieval Italian comic tradition which are sustained by Fo in the twentieth century. They are the Saturnalian spirit of the *Palliata* comedies and the performance tradition of *Giullare* which have been a decisive influence on Fo's theatre.

The fourth article of this series by Costantino Maeder is an analysis of Fo's famous *Giullarata Mistero Buffo*. He reveals that though apparently a finished text, it remains elusive and controversial both in form and content. Different versions of the text and its multi-layered structure, for instance, the historical frame, nullification of individual and time, manipulation of facts and the father/son dichotomy makes it a more complex and elevates it to the level of the literary text.

The fifth essay by Joseph Farrell traces the commonality between Fo and Ruzzante (Angelo Beolco), the Renaissance Italian actor-author named after the

famous character he created. He has been a powerful influence on Fo and the development of his theatre. His satirical farces, the peasant origin of his characters and his use of dialect have been an inspiration to Fo profoundly affecting his theatrical poetics. In addition to other influences, he served as a model for Fo who is indebted to him for the technical virtuosity he borrowed from him and which he paid off by admiring him in his noble acceptance speech.

Next article of Tony Mitchell gives a preview of Fo's unnoticed accomplishment of songwriting, written for his plays as well as individual compositions. Like the subject of his plays, the subject of his early songs is the working class people sharing the same grotesque and carnivalesque characteristics of his comedies, his commiseration with the oppressed and his criticism of the bourgeois morality and authority.

Bent Holm's article is an attempt to review Fo's "bourgeois period" which is generally ignored. He argues that same kind of themes and patterns can be found in his earlier productions that has the capacity as he says, "to transcend categories of bourgeois or political" (141).

Jennifer Lorch's article compares different versions of English translations and performances of *Accidental Death of Anarchist* and its reception by the English audiences. Lorch concludes that it is not possible to create a faithful English version of this play in translation or performance whether in England or in the United States because of the wide gulf between the political climates of the two countries.

The following article by Sharon Wood on Franca Rame is an acknowledgment of her distinctive contribution to theatrical and politics. Wood suggests that Rame's zealous support for women's cause especially their sexual and economic liberation has resulted in several plays and monologues, including the famous *All Bed, Board, and Church*, which has made her a feminist icon. But her feminism is not the radical feminism rather shaped by her own personal belief. She believes that monogamous heterosexuality is the major source of women's happiness.

Paolo Puppa assesses the significance of Fo in Italian theatre. Puppa considers that his stature as a "great actor" and "popular entertainer" is the result of his combining together various traditions that makes him unique and one of the favourites

of theatre. Therefore, for a deeper understanding of Fo, the reader has to locate those diverse traditions which make his art richer and durable.

Finally, Farrell has attempted to reconcile between his poetics and politics. He contends that his poetics is sufficient to earn him a place in theatre history even though the performer does not exist anymore. He argues that Fo's theatre is primarily the "theatre of situation" and his skill in contriving situations leaves a lasting imprint on the spectators and the readers.

Dario Fo's *The Tricks of the Trade* also known as *The Actor's Mini-Manual* (1991), is a record of his dramatic experiences and skills that he has learned during his professional career. It is not merely a manifestation of his art and craft but a statement of his own theatrical experiences and techniques he admired and employed in his work. This mini-manual is a collection of discussions, workshops, lectures and seminars which later were rendered in a book form and which he tried to communicate to his disciples. Distributed into six sections, the book is a reflection of his views on the art of performance, tracing the role and history of clown, masks, puppets, and the use of grammalet. The book also involves the discussion of his plays and their subsequent failure when performed outside Italy. In the last chapter, the discussion is turned over to Franca Rame who shares her experiences as an actress and collaborator of Dario Fo. She records her valuable comments on Fo's work and the association between women and clowns.

Stefania Taviano in *Staging Dario Fo and Franca Rame: Anglo-American Approaches to Political Theatre* (2005) focuses on the translation and stage production of Fo and Rame's plays in the United States and the United Kingdom and their reception by the audiences of both countries. Taviano has emphasized that the translation and consumption of any theatrical text especially in the case of Political Theatre is largely influenced by the social, political, cultural and dramatic traditions of the receiving society. She has further explained that there is no proposed model or prescribed set of rules justifiable for translating and adapting the Political Theatre of Fo and Rame to foreign audiences. Rather, their work is compliant with the patterns and traditions peculiar to the target society. As she writes in her introduction to the book:

Given that way in which political theatre is translated and received depends on the cultural, socio-political, and theatrical make-up of the target society, there

are no general patterns that are valid for the translation and staging of Fo and Rame's political theatre in any culture. Their work is instead subject to specific strategies and traditions, which are the product of the cultural and theatrical systems of the receiving societies and of the interaction between the later and foreign cultures. (01)

She also takes into consideration the complex nature of Political Theatre and the events and activities which constitute it before analysing the political nature of Fo and Rame's theatre. She argues that we need to look into two different perspectives while transferring Political Theatre from one culture to another culture, for example, the meaning and the role of Political Theatre in the source culture and its significance in the target culture. She highlights problems relating to transfer Fo and Rame's theatre outside Italy. She mentions that their theatre is responsive to immediate and specific socio-political circumstances furthermore, it derives from the classical theatre traditions and the *Commedia dell'Arte*. This mixture of art and politics, farcical exuberance and the seriousness of purpose makes their theatre very difficult to transpose. The major problem directors generally face while adapting Fo and Rame is maintaining the equilibrium between farce and the political credo of their theatre. The selection of only one aspect will make their work less effective. She gives ample of examples when an attempt to transmit them resulted in a failure. Instead of a detailed analysis of the problematical issues concerned with Anglicisation and Americanisation of Fo and Rame, the book opens dialogue for further explorations of the politics of transferring Political Theatre across cultures.

Dario Fo and Franca Rame: Passion Unspent (2015) by Joseph Farrell is an addendum to his previous biographical work *Dario and Franca Rame: Harlequins of the Revolution* (2001). Farrell resumes where he had left and his recent work extends over a short period of time from 1997 to 2015. He has made an effort to examine not only the theatrical credentials of Dario Fo and Franca Rame but also their political involvement, the social and environmental issues they endorsed as well as his paintings and his criticism of the greatest Italian artists. Farrell has acknowledged their spirit to carry on their work and to be a part of different social and political campaigns with the same vigour and valour even at the age when most of the people retire to a life of comfort and ease. But the advancing age of the couple does not affect their performance, diminish their curiosity and keenness, debilitate their imaginative

power and whose passion for life seems unexhausted. Fo steadfastly believed in the maxim that “actors die on stage”. His substantial contribution to theatre, politics, history, society, art, and culture cannot be ignored. There is no sign of a decrease in his interest or energy at any phase of life.

2.2 Secondary Materials on Dario Fo (Research Articles)

In addition to these critical books, plenty of erudite articles can be found on Dario Fo and his craft. They are valuable additions to the study of Fo and his theatrical ingenuity. “Dario Fo: Jester of the Working Class” (1998) of Domenico Maceri represents Dario Fo as the champion of the working class people and their culture. He has examined two important plays of this controversial playwright, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* and *Mistero Buffo*. These two plays of Fo are the clear manifestation of his irrepressible desire to recover people’s culture and their language. Fo believes that the lives of the poor people are controlled by the rich not only by the means of power but also through knowledge and religion. And it is the responsibility of the intellectuals to make them aware of the oppressed condition they are trapped into so that they can take necessary measures to amend and improve their situation. Inspired by the figure of *Giullare* (medieval strolling Player) who served as the spokesperson of the subjugated Fo used his theatre to represent the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. To uphold the dignity of the downtrodden becomes the *modus operandi* of his theatre. In the words of Maceri, “Fo’s *Giullare* serves the people, entertains them, but especially uses satire to show them their condition and spur them to action” (11).

Robert Scanlan’s “Fabulist’s Fable: Dario Fo Awarded Noble Prize! “Down With the King!” (1998), explores Dario Fo’s versatility as a theatre artist. This particular article focuses on Fo’s skill of appropriation of the popular folk-forms as the subversive mechanism of his politically committed theatre which culminated in his winning of the 1997 Noble Prize. Scanlan also refers to the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci, sixteen-century Ruzzante and the medieval *Joculator* who have been the greatest influence on Fo. “Dario Fo seems to have been born with an irrepressible instinct to ridicule anyone he caught in the act of “lording it over” anyone else” (Scanlan 99).

Antonio Scuderi has studied Fo from an anthropological point of view. His, “The Cooked and the Raw: Zoomorphic Symbolism in Dario Fo’s *Giullarate*” (2004), stresses upon carnivalesque principles integrated by Fo in his theatre. Scuderi has made a distinction between his satirical farce and the *Giullarate* (the one-man show). But here his centre of attention is *Giullarate* which were inspired by the strolling players of the Middle Ages. His *Giullarate* is based on the principles he has borrowed from the oral performance traditions. One of them is the principle of Saturnalia, the fertility rite in the honour of Saturn (God of agriculture) which is an important part of the Italian folk tradition and the European carnivalesque where everything is turned upside down and every rule is reversed by the grotesque figure known as the Lord of the Misrule, incarnation of the earth’s generative powers. The characters of Zanni, Arlecchino and Pulcinella of the *Commedia dell’Arte* are the embodiment of these primordial masked figures and their subversive and grotesque qualities. Fo’s purpose to embody these characters and their subversive and grotesque humour in his *Giullarate* is an important part of his mission to endorse the popular culture and to scourge the authority.

“The Anthropology of Dario Fo: An Interdisciplinary Approach” (2015) by Scuderi is an examination of the anthropological and folkloric roots of Fo’s theatre highlighting the significant contribution they have made in the evolution of Fo’s Left ideology and the development of his Popular Protest Theatre which of course is a reflection of his Marxist inclination. The close affinity between anthropology and Marxism because of their treatment of the subjects of the same interest that is the socio-cultural evolution of a community forms the ideological basis of Fo’s theatre. Besides, exploring some of the major anthropological and folkloric themes Scuderi has also exposed the constructive influences of Toschi, Levi-Strauss and Gramsci fundamental to his concept of theatre as an instrument of social change.

“Unmasking the Holy Jester Dario Fo” (2003), is a further attempt by Scuderi to study Fo with special reference to his *Giullarate*, one of his preferred theatrical medium modelled on oral performance traditions. He elucidates that among several of Fo’s themes, the representation of history is of major concern because it is an integral part of Fo’s mission to revive the popular culture which serves as the subversive mechanism of his theatre. He presents fact with good doses of fiction but with

reference to some authentic source generally mentioned in the Prologues of his plays which constitute the interpretive frame of a Fovian performance.

In “Dario Fo and Oral Tradition: Creating a Thematic Context” (2000), Scuderi has discussed certain interpretive codes which transmit meaning in Fo’s theatre, define his frame and constitute the poetics of his theatre. And he does this partly by repeating certain themes in his prologues, plays, interviews, and workshops. One recurring theme in his works is subversion of the official history and its representation from a proletarian perspective. The reason behind this is the exaltation of the working class and their culture. Many themes that occur in his plays are; the abuse of power, official versus the popular culture, the hegemony of the rich, subservient position of the poor and hypocrisy of the religious authorities. The repetition of these themes in different contexts forms the interpretive code of Fo’s performances.

“Dario Fo Explains: An Interview” (1978) is an excerpt from an interview with Fo authored by Luigi Ballerini, Giuseppe Riso, Dario Fo, Lauren Hallquist and Fiorenza Weinpple. It tells about the formative influences of the mixed elements of Commedia dell’Arte, *Fabulatori*, *Giullari*, puppet theatre, action or situation preceding the text, use of grannelot, the audience and the ever-evolving and immediate nature of the text which form the basis of Fovian theatre. It also informs about Fo’s turbulent theatrical career, his association with bourgeois theatre and his ideological battle with the Italian authorities.

In another example, “A Short Interview with Dario Fo” (1986-87) by Anders Stephanson, Daniela Salvioni, the theatrics of Dario Fo are debated. It throws light on the contentious issues of culture and politics treated by Fo which forms the dialectics of his theatre. By culture, Fo does not only mean the way of life what actually he means by culture is knowledge and a class consciousness. It is this cultural politics which drove Fo to develop his popular theatre.

“From Italian Roots to American Relevance: The Remarkable Theatre of Dario Fo” (1989) by Mimi D’Aponte reviews the impact of Fo on American theatre and assesses the relevance of his theatre in the American context. Despite, being denied entry in America in 1983, Fo enjoyed great popularity there and enough space has been given to his performances on the American stage. He exerts a considerable

amount of influence on American repertoires in terms of acting, playwriting, and the development of a new Political Theatre.

The article also informs about the performance style of Fo, his on-stage persona and the rapport he establishes with his fellow performers and his audiences. They are an inseparable part of his theatre and equally contribute to the production.

“The Throw-away Theatre of Dario Fo” (1975) by Suzanne Cowan focuses on the nature and scope of Fo’s theatre and its association with the contemporary Italian politics and agitational movements. Cowan has tried to make a distinction between the Agit-prop theatre, Guerrilla street theatre and the militant theatre of Dario Fo. Although the political radicalisation in Italy in the sixties motivated Fo to tap into explicit political content, his theatre is rooted in the popular performance traditions of the Middle Ages that gives him more freedom and flexibility.

In this article, “Dario Fo: The Roar of the Clown” (1986) Ron Jenkins opposed the idea of picturing Fo merely a political clown rather explores the artistic concerns of this politically committed theatre giant. Jenkins does not altogether refuse the political dimension of his plays but denies the single-minded representation of Fo as a political playwright. He asserts that his theatre is politically relevant but linked to political problems are the creative subtleties, i.e. the actor/audience relationship, deliberate use of local dialects, improvisation, the immediacy of performance, changing perspectives and gags which he says are generally lost by the translators and directors. He effortlessly combines art and politics under the rubric of effervescent comedy that makes him the modern clown. “Fo’s performance is an allegory of rebellion camouflaged behind a mask of crude buffoonery. The politics are clear, but they never overwhelm the piece’s exquisite slapstick poetics” (Jenkins 173).

The article, “Dario Fo: Puppets for Proletarian Revolution” (1972) by A. Richard Sogliuzzo traces the root of Fo’s theatre to the medieval jesters somewhere between the tenth and twelfth centuries who entertained people by their skits and gags on the one hand and provoked them against feudal exploitation on the other hand. Fo’s theatre is a remarkable blend of mime, circus clowning, visual gags, acrobatics, songs, dances, and puppetry. This is all used not only for comic purposes but as a subversive mechanism, part of Fo’s conviction for proletarian revolution. Commenting on Fo’s use of puppets Sogliuzzo says that he has used them with

prospects for wide-ranging satire on Italian establishments. His best puppet play is *Grand Pantomime with Banners and Small and Medium Size Puppets* (1969). These puppets symbolize all forms of political oppression. Yet in another example, *Death and Resurrection of a Puppet*, the puppets of Fascism and Bolshevism are represented on stage. Sogliuzzo utters:

In Fo's theatre, the medium is undoubtedly the message: a proletarian revolution to be accomplished by utilizing theatrical traditions born of the people, such as the feudal jester, the circus, the carnival, the music hall revue, and commedia dell'arte. (77)

"Fo and Feydeau: Is Farce a Laughing Matter" (1995) by Joseph Farrell is an investigation of the possible link between Fo's early farces and the French farce including the new black farce of Ionesco and Beckett which received new connotations in the 1950s, and the Boulevard farce associated with Feydeau. He has made a distinction between the absurd in farce and the existential absurd. He states:

The absurd in farce, which is a momentary suspension of order, is not synonymous with the existential Absurd which indicates an ontological absence of all order. The distinction is comparable to that which exists in crime and anarchy, or between blasphemy and atheism; the first is an assault on a code, while the second is a denial of the code. (Farrell 312)

One fundamental difference identified by Farrell between Fo, Ionesco, and Beckett is the plot. For Beckett and Ionesco plot is secondary but it remains central to Fo. Moreover, in Ionesco and Beckett speech has sovereignty over action, character, and situation. "On a purely theatrical level, the principal difference between Fo and Ionesco lies in the primacy of situation in Fo's theatre as against the centrality of language in Ionesco's. (Farrell 317). Absurd projects a world that is chaotic and nonsensical while Fo's drama is developed within a social and political framework and his world is material. These remarks by Farrell give a clearer picture of Fo, Feydeau, and Ionesco.

Feydeau, on the surface at any rate, laughed contentedly at imperfections in a world that was the best of all possible worlds, Ionesco jeered at a Absurd world that would never be amenable to improvement, while Fo, in guffawing at absurdities that were man-made, invited action to eliminate them. (Farrell 321)

Pina Piccolo's article "Dario Fo's *Giullarate*: Dialogic Parables in the Service of the Oppressed" (1988), is an exploration of the dialogic structures which Fo uses to produce knowledge. There are two preferred modes of Fo's performance, one is his 'Satirical Farces' and the second is his '*Giullarate*'. He uses them to convey different types of knowledge. While the former is used to address specific political issues conveying counter-information about them, the latter is employed to produce a more general and universal type of knowledge like, the dichotomy between the oppressor and the oppressed, dominant and the subordinate and poor and the rich. Indebted to Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony Fo projects himself as the messiah of the working class. Creation of a proletarian counterculture is the underlying idea of Fo's theatre which he believed was robbed and stripped of its dignity by the dominant class and he strives to revive them.

Farrell's "Variations on Theme: Respecting Dario Fo" (1998), highlights some of the major problems of translating Fo. He starts his discussion with the definition of a good translator. He says:

A translator is conventionally expected to content himself with a condition of self-effacing invisibility, which surpasses anything even Victorian parents once imposed on their off-springs. The good translator should be neither seen nor heard. He should fade into the background, and should expect that if his presence is noted, it is as a prelude to some censure or reproach. A translator will receive attention only when responsible for some gaffe, transgression or solecism which will require discussion and correction at a later date, once the guests have withdrawn. (Farrell 19)

The contention of Farrell is that in Fo's case this inconspicuousness of the translator is unfeasible. This is because of the controversial nature of his performances. For instance, the continuous modification of the script, his insistence on performance rather than text, his use of dialect which is often characterised with vulgarity and obscenity, combination of farce and political satire as well as of laughter and ire which are difficult to synthesize. Farrell emphasizes that conventional translation techniques will not suffice in translating Fo but the translators have to look beyond if they have to make an impact outside Italy. He recommends translation adaptation technique to translate Fo.

2.3 Summing Up

Thus, the literature survey conducted in this chapter foregrounds theatre as the most artistic form of social communication which has multifaceted dimensions from educating and instructing people to further social change. It clearly defines Fo's revolutionary politics who used theatre as a potent weapon to combat the oppressive system and to bring to fore the working class struggle for a classless society as well informs us of his prodigiously rich poetics. Unlike Pirandello, his Italian counterpart, he does not present an illusion of reality but his theatre is deeply steeped in the contemporary events and incidents, satire and farce remain his main vehicle to present contemporary realities and to ridicule the power holders. He works in the tradition of medieval *Giullare*, the Harlequin of the *Commedia dell'Arte* and the sixteenth-century Ruzzante that makes him unique from other dramatists of the period. He is a traditionalist in his approach and revolutionary in his style. These critical books and articles have analysed Fo from various perspectives giving useful insights into his writings. One thing is clear from the above survey that his work presents a great fusion of art and politics. Politics is inextricably linked to his theatre and constitutes one of the major themes of his plays. Among other themes protest, resistance, history, and culture are of immense importance and will form the main argument of this thesis.

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