

Chapter 3

*Marginalised Conception and the
Role of Hegemony:
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The search for the substance of history, the identification of that substance in the system and the relations of production and exchange, leads one to discover how human society is split into two classes. The class which owns the instruments of production already necessarily knows itself, it has consciousness, albeit confused and fragmentary, of its power and its mission. It has individual ends and it attains them through its capacity to organize, coldly, objectively, without worrying whether its road is paved with bodies reduced by hunger or corpses on battlefields.

(David Forgacs 38)

3.0 Introduction

This chapter undertakes to discuss the political theories of Gramsci which are seen as a deviation from the traditional Marxist approach and were fundamental to the expansion of the modern concept of power. There is no denying the fact that others have not talked about power. Theorists like Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Max Weber, Robert Dahl, Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, Steven Lukes, Anthony Giddens, John Gaventa and Stewart Clegg have added to the discussion of power. But this study primarily engages with Gramsci's concept of power implicit in his political and cultural theories which are the ideological essence of Fo's theatre as well as his artistic expression.

The social and political theories evoked by Gramsci gave new dimensions to class struggle as well as new interpretations of Marxist literary criticism in examining the power relations. They have been colossal in organizing anti-capitalist and anti-democratic resistance and were harnessed by political activists and artists as a challenge to social, political and cultural status quo. Theoretical elaborations of Gramsci are confined not only to Italian context but to wider political developments across Europe and other non-European countries during the last century and in the contemporary period. "As a militant socialist and leader of the Communist Party, Gramsci contributed tremendously to the struggles and development of the Italian and international proletarian movement" (Santucci 39). The above statement of Santucci establishes Gramsci as a political thinker and a political leader who has contributed

significantly to proletarian struggle, intellectually and practically at home and abroad. Diverse application of his work to history, philosophy, politics, literature, literary criticism, and theatre broadened its spectrum and transcended him of any 'ism'. In his introduction to Forgas's edition Hobsbawm mentions:

He has survived the political conjectures which first gave him international prominence. He has survived the European communist movement itself. He has demonstrated his independence of the fluctuations of ideological fashion. Who now expects another vogue for Althusser, any more than for Spengler? He has survived the enclosure in academic ghettos which looks like being the fate of so many other thinkers of 'western marxism'. He has even avoided becoming an 'ism'. (13)

Gramsci's centrality to the world intellectual scene is indebted to Palmiro Togliatti who preserved and published his writings. To understand the trajectory of Gramsci's political thoughts, it is required to re-map the political scenario of Italy and Europe during the last century which contributed greatly to his political and ideological formation.

3.1 Formation of Gramsci's Political Thoughts

Before unification, Italy was an assortment of provinces shared between local monarchs and outside forces. As a result of this provincial division, some chunks of the country progressed while the majority of the population lived in the impoverished state. Discontented with their insignificant subsistence a group of middle-class and upper-middle-class radicals revolted against the sovereignty of these self-styled rulers, campaigning for the fusion of autonomous estates into an independent democratic nation. This uprising for unification is collectively known as the *Risorgimento* (the Resurgence). However, Forlenza and Thomassen see it from a broader perspective.

In political terms, the *Risorgimento* was the process of independence and the unification of Italian nation between 1848 and 1860. However, in a more cultural perspective, the *Risorgimento* was a much broader nineteenth-century movement of liberation that culminated in the establishment of the kingdom of Italy in 1861. The *Risorgimento* was also an ideological and literary movement that helped arouse the national consciousness of Italians, leading to a series of political events that freed the Italian states from foreign domination

and united them politically. Since then, the Risorgimento has attained the status of national myth. (291)

The 'right-wing' Moderates, led by the liberal Count Camillo Cavour, and the 'Left Wing' Action Party, led initially by Giuseppe Mazzini and later by Giuseppe Garibaldi, were the two major political parties who played significant role in directing the course of Risorgimento and the formal declaration of Italian unification in 1861. After Italy was declared a parliamentary democracy, the two parties worked in collaboration. The period of Left-Right coalition post-unification till 1920 is generally known as the *Trasformismo* (transformation). This is the phase Gramsci was born into, in 1891.

Over a period of time, the Moderate had successfully transformed itself into a dominant political party of Italy largely dependent on intellectual leadership, representing a specific class of industrialists and estate owners. While, the inconsistent policies of Action Party such as, land reform, hostility to Church and its inability to connect to any particular class particularly, the peasant class whose interest it was supposed to serve, turned it into a peripheral party working under the thumb of the Moderates. Despite Giollitti's progressive reforms, the gap between South and North widened. While North became the modern industrial capital of Italy with Fiat Company established and the Bank of Italy formed, South was contingent to an agrarian economy. This question of South and North becomes the major concern of Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*. P.S.I. (Italian Socialist Party), continued to criticise the government through its party newspaper *Avanti* for its failure to bridge the gap between the two regions.

The impending War in 1914 created a situation of uncertainty whether Italy should intervene in it or not. While the Right was pro-intervention taking it as an opportunity to reclaim the lost territory from Austria, the Left was divided into 'non-interventionist faction' and 'interventionist faction'. The interventionists triumphed and Italy entered the war on the side of the allied forces. Although, Italy made territorial gains these could not compensate for the loss it suffered and the socio-political and economic crisis that followed the war. This political and economic instability and the failed leadership of the Left and the Right gave way to a new militant government led by Mussolini which by 1922 had established itself as a

dominant political force in Italy eliminating all opposition parties and came to be known as the National Fascist Party (PNF).

The success of the October Revolution (Russian Revolution) in 1917 had a sweeping influence on Italian politics and society. The two years after the War was seen as the strong probability for socialist revolution in Italy. Gramsci was the main theorist and propagandist of seeking the Leninist example in Italy. He expounded his views on the current political events in the socialist journals, *Il Grido del Popolo*, *Avanti*, and later *L'Ordine Nuovo* (The New Order), trying to explore the possibility of a working-class revolution in Italy inspired by Russian Revolution. These journals have been the ideological tool of the working class struggle. The Italian workers provoked by the prospect of installing a Soviet model of revolution in Italy planned their own insurgencies. But this uprising of the workers was suppressed instantly in absence of organisational effort and effective leadership either from the PSI or the Italian trade union association. The workers who had trusted upon its leadership felt betrayed over the waning possibility of revolution. This was far a greater loss for the Left as it lost its working-class base due to its lack of coordination. The inability of PSI to provide an institutional basis for proletarian revolution led to its disintegration and the formation of Italian Communist Party (CPI) in 1921 under the leadership of Amadeo Bordiga with an aim to provide an organisational basis to the proletariat struggle which was still vague and patchy in Italy. Gramsci too was one of the advocates of the renewal of Socialist Party and creation of an independent Italian Communist Party.

The existence of a cohesive and strongly disciplined Communist Party which, through its factory, trade-union and co-operative nuclei, co-ordinates and centralises within its own executive committee all of the proletariat's revolutionary activity, is the fundamental and indispensable condition for attempting any Soviet experiment. (Gramsci 53-54)

Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks* makes a close observation of PSI's failure to transform itself into the revolutionary vanguard party. He observes that in the face of the growing popularity of PSI and its outstanding performance in 1919 general elections in which it obtained almost two million votes and captured 156 parliamentary seats out of 508 seats, the party could neither organise itself nor could

unite the industrial proletariats and the peasants. In the wake of this power vacuum left by PSI, the fascist regime wrested control of the state backed by an insecure middle class and industrialists who aggrieved by PSI's ineptness to deal with the prevailing socio-political disorder emergent from a devastating war, its strategic flaw and internal contradictions decided to extend their support to the fascist organisation. The pro-business policies and the nationalist agenda articulated by Fascist Party attracted other sections of society such as the Church, the reactionary groups, and the army. In order to consolidate his power, Mussolini led a 'March on Rome' in 1922 and took over as the prime minister facing barely any opposition either from the king or the government. In an attempt to legitimise his office he announced a general election in 1924 which he accordingly won further reinforcing his power. He employed repressive measures to restrict the anti-fascist resistance of the Left by banning the strikes, the lockouts and the press as well as by dissolving the non-fascist organisations. Gramsci writes, "The fascist seizure of power in October 1922 was predictably enough followed by a vast wave of repression. In late 1922 and above all early 1923, it crushed most of the oppositional party organisations and press" (72). In 1921 Comintern (the Communist International) proposed an agenda of 'united front'; a synthesis of different Left Wing groups with mixed leadership which will empower the Left against fascism. This campaign of 'united front' was publicly discarded by Bordiga along with Fortichiari, Grieco, and Repposi. They were intransigent in their opposition to any alliance with other Left parties insisting on revolutionary confrontation with fascist power. To quote Forgas:

On the Fascist movement, Bordiga's position was that it was a symptom of capitalist crisis and that it would either collapse or be overthrown. He therefore saw a revolutionary confrontation in Italy as still on the agenda even after the Fascists came to power in October 1922. He argued that in these conditions the working class need to be decisively led by a vanguard party rather than have its revolutionary will diluted by co-operation with Socialist. (110)

A great majority of PCI supported Bordiga's point of non-collaboration and resisted the Comintern's proposal of fusion between the Communists and the Socialists.

While elsewhere in Europe, the Communist International (the Comintern) was arguing for a ‘united front’, which would ally communism with other progressive parties, the PCI under the leadership of Amadeo Bordiga persisted with a notion of ‘pure party’, untainted by coalition with non-revolutionary parties. (Jones 23)

Bordiga in a memorandum on “Relations between the P.C.I. and the Comintern” justified the idea of the Communist Party as a pure party and rejected any sort of compromise. Gramsci quotes Bordiga:

The present majority of the CP intends to defend to the last its position and historical role in Italy, where the unified Communist Party must be constituted with an ideological centre which is neither the traditional Socialist one nor a compromise with that. We are defending the future of the Italian revolution. The situation of the Socialist Party to a great extent depends upon a similar attitude in a group of Socialist leaders. They defend and will defend to the last and with every means their political profile and their future. We may have made mistakes and we are willing to amend them, but we are not willing to allow the centre of attraction and assimilation of new elements entering the Italian section of the Comintern to be shifted onto a new basis –represented by individuals who want to make a compromise with the Socialists on the fundamental issues. (79)

These doctrinal and tactical differences between the Comintern, the reformist-dominated C.G.L., the P.S.I. and the C.P.I. locked the Italian Left into an impasse and provided the fascist regime with an opportunity to strengthen its position. Commenting on the ambivalent nature of the Left politics Jones says:

Despite the Fascist’s supremacy, a sharp increase in Communist Party membership during 1923 and 1924 suggested that a worker’s revolution was still feasible. However, the majority of opposition continued to believe that the Fascists were a traditional political party, and could be resisted by parliamentary means. This was revealed as a tragic illusion when Fascist assassins murdered the socialist deputy Matteotti for denouncing Mussolini’s anti-democratic policies. As a consequence of this, opposition deputies left the parliament in the Aventine Secession, hoping to force the king into taking

action against the Fascists. Gramsci, by contrast, argued that the seceded 'parliament' should call for a general strike which could lead to a concerted counter-attack against fascism. Yet the opposition could not agree, and Mussolini used the absence of genuine popular resistance to begin a fresh wave of repression, turning Italy into a single-party dictatorship within two years. (24)

The failure of socialism was a triumph of fascism. The relatively incompetent Bourgeois-democracy and fragmented Left gave rise to fascist power. Different themes of fascism were presented like, most of the PCI leaders saw it as an alternative form of social-democracy serving the interests of the ruling class and developing a class consciousness in them. After the Matteotti crisis in 1924, the regime looked disjointed and it was expected that fascism would collapse, convincing once again of the feasibility of revolution. But, the striking back of the fascists after a year ascertained that it was an error of judgment on the part of the opposition, popularly known as the Aventine (Liberals, Republicans, Catholics, and Socialists) to undermine their strength. The overt repression of the fascist regime extinguished the hope of revolution and trampled the sentimental and infantile notion of Italy as a socialist republic. Gramsci too misread the situation. He believed that this crisis will break the alliance between the capitalists and the middle classes which formed the mass base of the Fascist movement, propelling the formation of a bourgeois democracy. He considered it a transitional and preparatory phase in the struggle for the socialist revolution which is only delayed by Fascism but not made impossible.

With hindsight it is easy to see that Gramsci's reading of the situation in 1924 overestimated the crisis of Fascism and underestimated the depth of its political and ideological resources. One can also see that his attitude towards the legalitarian opposition was too sectarian under the circumstances, given that by the end of 1926 the Fascists had installed a dictatorship and outlawed all the opposition parties. (Forgacs 135-136)

The political failure of proletarian revolution demoralised the workers and made them sceptic of the struggling Left. This further widened the gap between general public and the Italian Left who now looked for an alternative platform for their representation. In the circumstances marked by uncertainty and degeneration of

the Italian Left, the petite bourgeois who were formerly inclined to socialism turned to Fascism while the disappointed peasantry leaned towards the Popular Party. This shifting of power centres and wavering loyalties between masses and political parties created a situation of crisis.

This is the present situation of the Italian popular masses –great confusion, replacing the artificial created by the war and personified by the Socialist Party. A great confusion which has found its point of dialectical polarisation in the Communist Party, independent organization of the industrial proletariat; in the Popular Party; organization of the peasantry; and in Fascism, organization of the petty bourgeois. The Socialist Party, which from the armistice to the occupation of the factories represented the demagogic confusion of these three classes of the working people, is today the major exponent and the most notable victim of the process of disarticulation (towards a new, definitive order) which the popular masses of Italy are undergoing as a consequence of the breakdown of democracy. (Forgacs 125)

These political events and struggles taking place not only in Italy but throughout Europe, were essential in forming Gramsci's political consciousness and in developing his political ideologies seeped through his political writings. According to Hall:

This historical conjuncture, a strikingly condensed and contradictory moment of political struggles, victories, defeats, and transformations enabled Gramsci to see some very important and profound things about Marxism, about the nature of Western industrial capitalism, and about the nature of proletarian and other forms of social struggle. I think there is a clear relationship between Gramsci as a political militant, the political moment in which he is formed, the forms of consciousness and action to which he relates, and his legacy as a Marxist thinker. (Lecture 7)

3.2 Gramsci's Negotiations of Power

These writings are a nuanced account of the power relations in society. They are an investigation into, how power is acquired, legitimized, practiced, maintained and how it can be resisted. From Gramsci's point of view, "The supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as domination and as intellectual and moral leadership"

(193). In Gramsci's opinion the dominant groups within democratic societies do not directly control through enforcing their will on the subordinate group, rather they maintain their authority by winning the consent of subaltern group. Thus, people themselves give their consent to be exploited by the dominant group. Gramsci further claims that power is diffused, pervasive, flexible and elusive which is internalised by the subjugated as a matter of common sense.

In order to maintain its authority, a ruling power must be sufficiently flexible to respond to new circumstances and to the changing wishes of those it rules. It must be able to reach into the minds and lives of its subordinates, exercising its power as what appears to be a free expression of their own interests and desires. (Jones 3-4)

He considers power not simply as an object but a complex of relationships embedded within social, political, historical and cultural realities of which an individual is a product. Gramsci's concept of power transgresses the conventional Marxist view of economic determinism. Distancing himself from this reductionist approach to overemphasising on economic relations, Gramsci focuses on socio-political and cultural relations for the analysis of power. Unlike the traditional Marxists who argued that economy determines everything in the society, Gramsci claims that politics, culture, and economy are dovetailed into a web-like a relationship that exists between the dominant and the ruled classes. Believing that a person is the product of ideological and material conditions specific to a society. It can be settled from the above argument that power for Gramsci, is not an entity or a material possession but a process of negotiations and transactions between social classes which he calls hegemony. "A lived hegemony is always a process. It is not, except analytically, a system or a structure. It is a realised complex of experiences, relationships, and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits" (Williams 112). It is an instrument to legitimise the authority of a particular social group mediated through various social capillaries. In Adamson's opinion, "Hegemony served Gramsci as a point of intersection where many of his other conceptual commitments; culture, ideology, language, totality, intellectual, revolution, and political education dialectic can be brought into mutual rapport" (176).

Whereas Gramsci is now popularly identified with the concept of 'hegemony', it was Lenin who first used the term to define a strategy for the peasant rebellion

against the Tsar. Gramsci offered a new interpretation of the term. He does not provide a clear-cut definition of hegemony but construes it as an ensemble of social relations. He distinguishes it from coercion and sees it in terms of consensual power relations and subordination. He considers it as a political and cultural authority combined with consent. Jones says, “Gramsci’s more common definition of hegemony is consequently of a situation synonymous with consent” (52). According to Adamson, hegemony is “The consensual basis of an existing political system within civil society” (170). Williams defines hegemony simultaneously discerning it from ideology:

Hegemony is not only the articulate upper level of ‘ideology’, nor are its forms of control only those ordinarily seen as ‘manipulation’ or ‘indoctrination’. It is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses an assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values –constitutive and constituting –which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members for the society to move, in most areas of their lives. It is, that is to say, in the strongest sense a ‘culture’, but a culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes. (110)

Jones’s conceptualizes hegemony as:

Moral and intellectual leadership which treats the aspirations and views of subaltern people as an active element within the political and cultural programme of the hegemonizing bloc. This understanding of hegemony as an ongoing form of negotiation represents an advance on conceptions of power which see it as the static possession of a particular social group. (55)

The above-provided definitions of hegemony confirm that it is inevitably linked to our social existence through representing our interests, articulating our aspirations, shaping our world-view and defining our identities. It is an internalised system of meaning and values lived as common sense. From Williams’ viewpoint:

Hegemony is always an active process, but this does not mean that it is simply a complex of dominant features and elements. On the contrary, it is always a more or less adequate organization and interconnection of otherwise separated and even disparate meanings, values, and practices, which it specifically incorporates in a significant culture and an effective social order. (115)

These hegemonic principles and morals are so closely tied to our life that it becomes very tricky to discriminate between state power and everyday life. The modern capitalist states do not draw on force to control their subordinate rather they govern them by directing their social life and influencing their opinion. As Williams articulates:

The idea of hegemony, in its wide sense, is then especially important in societies in which electoral politics and public opinion are significant factors, and in which social practice is seen to depend on consent to certain dominant ideas which in fact express the needs of a dominant class. (145)

A hegemonic rule is not a static realm of dominant ideas but a dynamic process which, “Has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continuing to be resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures, not at all its own. We then have to add to the concept of hegemony the concepts of counter-hegemony and alternative hegemony” (Williams 112-113). Adamson rejects rigid implication of the concept, hegemony.

For Gramsci’s hegemony is not a static concept but a process of continuous creation which, given its massive scale, is bound to be uneven in the degree of legitimacy it commands and to leave some room for antagonistic cultural expressions to develop. (174)

This suggests that hegemony cannot be restricted to absolute and exclusive authority that once achieved cannot be altered. As Williams says:

The reality of any hegemony, in the extended political and cultural sense, is that, while by definition it is always dominant, it is never either total or exclusive. At any time, forms of alternative or directly oppositional politics and culture exists as significant elements in the society. Any hegemonic

process must be especially alert and responsive to the alternatives and opposition which question and threaten its dominance. (113)

The following statement from Gramsci signifies the viability of an alternative hegemony:

In the hegemonic system, there exists democracy between the 'leading' group and the groups which are 'led', in so far as the development of the economy and thus the legislation which expresses such development favour the (molecular) passage from the 'led' groups to the 'leading' group. (Gramsci 210)

The dialectical unity between structure and superstructure that is the reciprocity between the social relations of production and ideas, is represented through the concept of the historical bloc. "Structures and superstructures form a "historical bloc". That is to say the complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble of the superstructures is the reflection of the ensemble of the social relations of production" (Gramsci 690). Forgas defines it as, "The moment of hegemony and consent" (195). The concept also refers to the alliance between different social groups and homogeneity of their interests in a given historical moment. This unity is important in creation and dissension of hegemony.

The post-war political developments have helped him to understand that advanced capitalist states perpetuate their power through hegemony which he says, "Operates in many diverse ways and under many aspects within the capillaries of society" (Buttigieg 17). Instead of using force they rely on securing the collective will (consent) of people to maintain their hegemony. Critiquing Rosa Luxemburg's opinion of the mass strike and Trotsky's conception of permanent revolution Gramsci states:

In the East the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortress and earthworks: more or less numerous from one State to the next, it goes without saying –but this precisely necessitated an accurate reconnaissance of each individual country. (494)

The aborted socialist revolution in Italy elsewhere in Europe was testimony that Western industrial states have hegemonic capacities to rule. Therefore, a different line of revolution must be followed in these countries with redefined strategies. As Gramsci asserts:

In the case of most advanced states, where “civil society” has become a very complex structure and one which is resistant to the catastrophic “incursions” of the immediate economic element (crises, depressions, etc.). The superstructures of civil society are like the trench systems of modern warfare. In war it would sometime happens that a fierce artillery attack seemed to have destroyed the enemy’s entire defensive system, whereas in fact it had only destroyed the outer perimeter; and at the moment of their advance and attack the assailants would find themselves confronted by a line of defence which was still effective. (489)

Contrasting the political conditions in Russia to that of West Gramsci claims that situations in Russia were favourable to revolution but the situations in the West are very different.

In the advanced capitalist countries, the ruling class possesses political and organizational reserves which it did not possess, for instance, in Russia. This means that even the most serious economic crises do not have immediate repercussions in the political sphere. Politics always lags behind economics, far behind. The state apparatus is far more resistant than is often possible to believe; and it succeeds, at the moments of crisis, in organising greater forces loyal to the regime than the depth of the crisis might lead one to suppose. This is especially true of the more important capitalist states. (Gramsci 408-409)

The road to power in such states is not that much simple because they have developed a complex structure in the form of civil society which is represented as trench and fortress, resilient to any infiltration. Therefore, the course of class struggle must be shifted from the ‘war of manoeuvre/frontal attack’ to the ‘war of position/hegemony’ which is directed into the realm of civil society. “In the West civil society must be conquered, before the frontal assault on the state” (Gramsci 446). Since, “In politics the ‘war of position’, once won, is decisive definitively” (Gramsci 495).

The above-presented arguments corroborate that state in the West is a complex build of superstructures compartmentalized by Gramsci, into 'civil society' and political society'. This division between 'civil society' and 'political society' is functionally related to a particular society in a particular situation.

What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two superstructural levels: the one that can be called "civil society", that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called "private", and that of "political society" or the "state". These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of "hegemony" which the dominate group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of "direct domination" or command exercised through the state and "juridical" government. (Gramsci 145)

The voluntary association of political parties, Church, family, school, sport, and media form the sphere of 'civil society' which corresponds to 'indirect control'. Whereas, military, police and juridical system form the sphere of 'political society' which corresponds to 'direct control'. Gramsci connects hegemony to 'civil society'. The civil society is the terrain of socio-political and cultural organisations which are indirectly regulated by the state. It mediates between state/political society and economy. As Gramsci points out, "Between the economic structure and the state with its legalisation and its coercion stands civil society" (448). Modern democracies largely make use of this domain which is a tightly woven network of practices and institutions, to maintain the status quo. They are recognised by Morton as, "Various social condensations of hegemony by the means of which a diffused and capillary form of indirect pressure becomes mediated through various organizations or capillary intellectual meatuses to exercise hegemonic class relations" (92). Civil society determines social values camouflaged as the cause of the common good. It blurs the distinction between self-government and imposed authority.

The assertion that the state can be identified with individuals, must serve to determine the will to construct within the husk of political society a complex and well-articulated civil society, in which the individual can govern himself without his self-government thereby entering into conflict with political society but rather becoming its normal continuation, its organic complement. (Gramsci 543)

The civil society functions as a state apparatus reinforcing its hegemony even in the moments of crisis when it can no longer generate consent. Civil society is a set of apparatuses which are continuously involved in the creation of hegemony, its maintenance, as well as organising consent. The complex superstructures of civil society are the key mechanism in the hegemonic formation and its dissemination. Forgas explains civil society and the way it is related to and is distinct from political society:

Civil society is a site of consent, hegemony, direction in conceptual opposition to the political society which is a site of coercion, dictatorship, domination. Civil society is therefore, in Gramsci, at once the political terrain on which the dominant class organises its hegemony and the terrain on which opposition parties and movements organize, win allies and build their social power. Gramsci says that this distinction between political society and civil society is not organic but methodological. By this he means that, although the two levels must be analytically distinguished from one another, they must also be seen as being intertwined in practice. One might illustrate this by saying that a state education system is at one level clearly part of political society, just as trade unions are when they take part in tripartite planning with employers and government. But this does not mean that everything which takes part in schools or trade unions is subservient to the state or reflect the ruling class interest. By making such methodological distinction between the two spheres, Gramsci avoids on the one hand a liberal reductionism, which sees civil society as a realm of free individuality entirely apart from the state, and on the other a statist and functionalist reductionism, which sees everything in society as belonging to the state and serving its interests. (224)

As the nexus of hegemony and civil society, stand the intellectuals. In general sense of the term, all people are intellectuals since they have intellectual capacity but not all have the function of intellectuals in society. As Gramsci elaborates:

All men are potentially intellectuals in the sense of having an intellect and using it, but not all are intellectuals by social function. When one distinguishes between intellectuals and non-intellectuals, one is referring in reality only to the immediate social function of the professional category of the intellectuals,

that is, one has in mind the direction in which their specific professional activity is weighted, whether towards intellectual elaboration or towards muscular-nervous effort. This means that, although one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist. (131, 140)

Extending his argument he says, “Intellectuals are those people who give a social group homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields” (Gramsci 135). They play an active role in organising, propagating, and contesting the hegemony of a particular social group. Highlighting the functions of intellectuals Morton states:

The scope of intellectual activity is thus amplified within the notion of the ‘integral state’ and the wider ensemble of social relations. An understanding of the social basis of hegemony is also therefore developed. How hegemony is exercised throughout state-civil society relations by the mediating function of intellectuals organically tied to particular social classes, not only in the economic but also the social and political fields, is then realised. (93)

Gramsci has specified two types of intellectuals, ‘traditional intellectuals’ who consider themselves independent of any social formation and ‘organic intellectuals’ who are organically bound to a social class.

Intellectuals in the functional sense fall into two groups. In the first place there are the “traditional” professional intellectuals, literary, scientific and so on, whose position in the interstices of society has a certain inter-class aura about it but derives ultimately from past and present class relations and conceals an attachment to various historical class formations. Secondly, there are the “organic” intellectuals, the thinking and organising element of a particular fundamental social class. These organic intellectuals are distinguished less by their profession, which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong. (Gramsci 131)

The latter category of intellectuals has two-dimensional functions to play. First, they actively participate in the formation and dissemination of hegemony by the dominant social group, and second, they are crucial in the development of alternative

hegemony of the subaltern class. Thus, they act as mediators between the two classes in the struggle for hegemony.

Language and culture are too, conceived by Gramsci as hegemonic instruments. His study of linguistics at the university gave him a deeper understanding of language. Instead of viewing it as merely a system of linguistic expression he perceives language as:

A totality of determined notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of content. In language, there is contained a specific conception of the world. Language is a metaphor and at the same time, a living thing and a museum of fossils of life and civilizations. (Gramsci 626, 813, 814)

If, language contains the worldview of a particular culture or a class. From language, can be assessed the stretch of one's ideas and opinions about the world. For example:

Someone who only speaks dialect, or understands the standard language incompletely, necessarily has an intuition of the world which is more or less limited and provincial, which is fossilised and anachronistic in relation to the major currents of thought which dominate world history. His interests will be limited, more or less corporate or economic, not universal. (Gramsci 629).

Apart from, containing the mores, identities and world philosophies of a particular culture language is also used to reinforce the values and ideologies of the dominant culture. It serves the hegemonic purpose by creating and communicating false impressions and false images of the dominant culture. It is the manifestation of power relations by representing class interests.

Gramsci acknowledged the important role played by culture in the reproduction of social relations and in forging of hegemony. Culture is a unifying whole, from determining our life to defining our identities. Culture is an organisation of our social, political, intellectual, moral, spiritual and recreational thoughts and practices. Gramsci pressed on the cultural expressions of hegemony which is an anti-economist approach to Marxism. Adamson points out:

Classical Marxism never gave sufficient weight to noneconomic factors like ideology and culture in the reproduction of social relations. For the most part,

Marx and Engels treated ideology narrowly as a belief system without being sensitive to the full range of its cultural manifestations. And their treatment of culture, it seems safe to say, never approached the level of depth and insight previously achieved by idealist like Kant, Schiller, or Hegel. With the concept of hegemony, Gramsci was able to surpass classical Marxism in both these respects. Not only did the concept call attention to the wide variety of cultural manifestations in which ideology appears, but it also revived the idealistic concern with culture and then superseded it by analysing the complex interconnections between culture and politics which the idealist had suppressed. (175-176)

Integrated into the institutions of civil society, culture has been used as a tool to legitimize the power of the bourgeoisie. Power is interspersed throughout our daily experiences, negotiations, and transactions conceptualised as a culture. Gramsci also associated culture with a higher stage of self-awareness the realisation of which can lead one from a powerless position to an authoritative position.

Culture is organisation, discipline of one's own inner self, it is ownership of one's own personality, is the attainment of a superior conscience, through which one's own historical worth, one's role in life, one's rights and duties become understood. However, all of the above cannot occur by spontaneous evolution, by actions and reactions independent of one's will, as in vegetable and animal life, in which every single being unconsciously selects and specifies its own organs according to a pre-established order of things. Man is above all spirit, that is, historical creation; it is not nature. Otherwise, it would be difficult to explain why, the exploited and the exploiter and the creator of wealth and its egoistic consumers having always existed, socialism has not been realised yet. The fact is that only gradually layer upon layer has mankind become aware of its worth and has conquered the right to live independently of the planning and the rights of minorities that have asserted themselves in prior times. And this conscience has been shaped not through the brutal stings of physiological necessities, but through intelligent reflection, at first by a few and then by an entire social class, about the best methods to convert a state of vassalage into a state of rebellion and social reconstruction. This means that every revolution has been preceded by an intense critical activity, by cultural

penetration, by the permeation of ideas through the gathering of individuals, recalcitrant at first and only concerned with solving their own economic and political problems, day by day, hour by hour, without bonds of solidarity with others enduring the same conditions. (Santucci 34-35)

The progressive ideas of Gramsci put him at the forefront of the Italian proletariat revolution. The question of proletarian education and revision of the administrative policies of the Italian Left have been the major preoccupation of him. The political and cultural concepts elaborated by Gramsci have multi-dimensional implication i.e. in politics, humanities, social science and cultural studies. They are still very much pertinent in exploring the power relations within modern democracies which work in a more ambiguous way.

Politically Italy has been a polarised state with different political forces; the reactionary forces and those on the Left, involved in direct as well as the ideological struggle to maintain their dominance. The constant struggle for social, political, and economic control of the post-World War II period has affected every realm of Italian life especially cultural, which was influenced in a certain way. Since it has been decisive in a political and ideological struggle during this period hence, no artistic or intellectual activity can be claimed non-ideological and apolitical. Theatre, being the community-oriented form of art had actively participated in the cultural politics of the post-war period.

3.3 Italian Theatre: From its Latin Roots to the Classic Comedies of Dario Fo

Italian theatre has its roots in Latin and Greek times. The early Italian theatre developed form imitation and translation of Greek drama/theatre. Some of the important names to count from the period are Seneca, Menander, Plautus, and Terence who had a profound influence on Renaissance theatre artists. The repressive Christianity and the growing interest of Italians in spectacle led to a dramatic impasse. However, the itinerant performers provided theatrical continuity between the ancient time and the medieval period. In his famous essay on ‘Secular and Religious Drama in the Middle Ages’ Newbigin states:

In the millennium that we call the Middle Ages, between the gradual decline of the Roman Empire and the reawakening of interest in the cultural experiences of antiquity that we call the Renaissance, spectacle flourished in

almost every aspect of Italian life: individual rites of passage through life, rituals of propitiation for the next, celebrations in the honour of city's patrons, expression of civic pride and gestures for the pleasure of the city. It was an age without dedicated theatre space, without professional actors, without any desire to distinguish between festa and theatre. It did however, have a vast range of performances: the theatre of preachers, and of giullari, storytellers, jugglers and tumblers, agonistic entertainments like jousts, horse races, contests of all kind, ritual processions and propagandistic parades and religious festivals of all sorts. (09)

There can be found two types of theatrical representations during the Middle Ages; the liturgical and the secular. The former type was organised by the Church authorities within the Church premises interpolated into the liturgy of Easter, Christmas and other rituals which later evolved into the *sacra rappresentazione* (holy performance) of the fifteenth century Florence. Newbigin records that, "Easter plays are probably the most resilient of all the medieval dramatic forms" (16). The latter type is, the satiric and hilarious performances of *Giullari* who might be taken as the keepers up of the ancient masks. As, J.H. Whitfield verifies "Alongside this is the work of the *Giullari*, or jocolatores, who might by a stretch of evidence or the imagination be taken as continuers of the ancient masks" (144).

Although the *sacra rappresentazione* were performed throughout Italy, Florentine dominance remains uncontested. It became the epicentre of religious performances staged by various confraternities which gradually spread to the rest of Italy. As Newbigin chronicles:

In the course of the fifteenth century Florentines became pre-eminent in the performances of religious plays, as in all the creative arts. The earliest plays were representations of the Annunciation, Ascension and Pentecost mounted in the conventual churches of San Felice in Piazza, Santa Maria del Carmine and Santo Spirito. (16)

Stories from the Bible and lives of the great saints were the major focus of the *sacrarappresentazione* in contrast to the lasciviousness of the Carnival performances. Feo Belcari, Lorenzo de' Medici, Castellano Castellini, Giuliano Dati are the few names to count from this period who wrote in this genre.

Towards the end of the century when aristocracy was introduced to Italian society these performances moved to the courts and were supervised by the nobility who modified it according to their own preferences. The result was flourishing of new paradigms of theatre which Italy witnessed in the later years. Newbigin concludes:

The progressive aristocratisation of Italian society between the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century shifted the festive resources of Italian society from the hands of the lay confraternities into the princely courts, and princes had different priorities and different tastes. Lorenzo de' Medici may have written a *sacra rappresentazione* for his son's confraternity, but for public consumption in the St John the Baptist procession of 1491, he commissioned a series of triumphs on neo-classical themes. The inspiration for these performances came not from the performers themselves, but from the prince who commissioned and controlled new kinds of artistic endeavour to the glory of himself rather than of God and the city. And it is in this new court-centred culture that new models of theatre will be pioneered in the coming centuries. (24)

The new interest in classical learning and insistence to reproduce the classical models had a far-reaching effect on Italian theatre culture. On the one hand, the inquisitiveness in classical learning brought unknown works to the Italian stage and on the other hand, the desire to imitate the classic examples affected the dramatic structure of the play. The renaissance artists insisted on close observance of the three unities (time, place, action), division of plays into five acts and distinction between tragedy, comedy, and tragicomedy. In view of Richard Andrews:

Italian humanists insisted dogmatically that, in the new cultural world which they were creating for society's elites, ancient Greek and Roman models should be followed and medieval ones obliterated. All the drama of the recent past was seen as totally lacking in cultural and social prestige. This attitude had a radical effect on the composition of plays and on the attitudes expected from audiences. On the one hand, it transformed the techniques and practice of dramaturgy. It became obligatory to divide plays into five acts, a structure which does not exist formally in the Greek and Roman plays regarded as canonical models, but which had been imposed on them retrospectively by

scholars in late antiquity. More authentically, the humanists insisted on sharply distinguishing separate genre of comedy and tragedy, with pastorals as a later and more innovative addition. Eventually, from the 1560s onwards, Italian scholars inflicted dramatic theory and practice with the constraints of the 'three unities'; time, place and action, allegedly derive from Aristotle. (32)

In addition to change in dramatic techniques and practice there were innovations in the physical environment of performance like permanent theatrical spaces with separate seating arrangements for male and female audiences, raised stage marked as performing area, elevated space for dignitaries having the status almost of a second stage and use of scenography. "The desire to resurrect ancient modes of dramaturgy was naturally associated with attempts to understand and re-create ancient theatre architecture" (Andrews 33).

Renaissance also changed the attitude towards drama from an activity of fun and frolic to a serious artistic enterprise parallel to another literary genre of rank such as, poetry which gave new heights to dramatic art. As Andrews assesses, "Such a rise in status also aided the progressive transformation of play performance into an autonomous cultural activity, in contrast with the strictly occasional character of medieval religious and courtly drama" (32-33).

The renaissance artists' contribution to drama/theatre cannot be underestimated but their too much strictness to form and technical aspects (neo-classicism) often overlooked the practical concerns of theatre/drama. Expressing his opinion about this issue Andrews writes:

In fact the whole history of the dramatic art in sixteenth century Italy can be seen as a struggle between scholarly intentions and practical demands - both sides of the conflict being firmly rooted in real passion and real social pressures which were characteristic of the period and the place. (33)

Another epochal change that occurred in the field of drama/theatre was the commercialization of theatre. This led to the progression of commercial theatre first in Venice and from Venice to other Italian cities. The audiences had to pay for watching the performance.

Along with physical changes in performance spaces came social and economic changes, in terms of why, when and for whom theatre was performed: the

eventual outcome was that audiences were asked to pay for their entertainment. Commercial theatre developed first of all in Venice: as early as 1517 there are records of tickets being sold for shows in private houses. Full public theatres developed in the same city in the 1580s, as money-making enterprises conceived by noble merchant families: rooms in their palaces, and then whole buildings, were redesigned for permanent performance use. As the seventeenth century progressed, it was Venice which led the way for the rest of the Italian peninsula in developing venues, and promoting commercial theatre and opera, in ways which might still be recognised in the twenty-first century. (Andrews 36)

The development of Italian theatre/drama counts on three dramatic productions from this period. They are comedy, tragedy and pastoral drama with comedy taking, “Clear chronological precedence: in performance terms, neither tragedy nor ‘regular’ pastorals were attempted earlier than the 1540s” (Andrews 39). Explaining reasons for the precedence of the comic genre over the other two genres mentioned above Andrews states:

It is not difficult to understand why the more light-hearted genre came first. Of the genre of ancient theatre which were available for Humanist study, it was the Roman comedy of Plautus and Terence which was most approachable. Far fewer people got to grips with the ancient Greek language, for all its prestige, than with Latin. Moreover, to understand Greek tragedy required an enormous leap of the social and religious imagination, while the comedy of Aristophanes employed a subversive mockery of living individuals and institutions with which Italian Renaissance society was explicitly unwilling to cope. By contrast, even before the year 1500, Roman comedies were well known in the classroom, and therefore familiar at least to an upper-class male audience. Terence had long been studied just for his moral aphorisms, and knowledge of Plautus had been boosted by the rediscovery of twelve new comedies in 1429. Plautus and Terence were first performed in Latin in universities and academies. From the late fifteenth century in princely courts, especially those of the Este rulers of Ferrara, they were given in long-winded verse translation. (39)

The new Italian model of *commedia erudita* (Erudite Comedy) was an offshoot of the Roman Comedy based on imitation especially in terms of plot construction. Although, borrowing from the earliest resources the new comedy differed in a number of ways. It represented characters from a middle and lower class society confined itself to a single setting and to an action not exceeding more than one day. They had nothing to do with psychological representation but dealt with everyday problems of the people. Their preferred medium is prose and mimetic language.

Ludovico Ariosto is the first major author of the regular comedy. His *La cassaria* (The Play of the Strong Box, 1508) and *I suppositi* (The Substitutes, 1509) are a milestone in the development of the new genre of comedy. The other two comedies of Ariosto include *Il negromante* (The Necromancer, 1528) and *La Lena*, 1528. All the four comedies are performance texts written to be performed at Carnival sponsored by the Este family, Ferrara. Peter Brand's account gives a more clear idea of these plays. He writes:

All four of Ariosto's comedies are explicit imitations of plays by Plautus or Terence: they all centre on family problems, and particularly on the efforts of young men abetted by their servants to obtain girls denied them by their elders: deception and disguise are their prime tools, making for scenes of outrageous and boisterous humour whether they succeed or, is often the case, fail – leaving it to the late revelation of a long-lost identity to remove the obstacles to marriage and a happy ending. Women's roles are restricted and acted by boys. The classical unities are observed with a single action presented on an unchanged street-scene within a limited time-space. Monologues and asides, eavesdropping and overhearing, mistaken identities, addresses to the audience, humour from double entendre, horse-play and other staple devices of Roman comedy are the norm. (Brand 47)

Bibbiena is the second important author after Ariosto who experimented in this new genre. His *La Calandra* (Calandro's play, 1513) a comedy in five acts is, "The most reprinted *commedia erudita* of the century, and one of the most frequently performed" (Andrews 42). It is a comedy of mistaken identity caused by reverse gender roles. The play is centred on identical twins of different sexes who in order to conceal their real selves are used to cross-dressing, reminding us of Plautus' *Menaechmi*. Andrews writes about the play:

The resulting hilarious confusions of gender roles are developed in the context of an adulterous affair, in which an impossibly gullible husband is roundly humiliated. The husband is named Calandro, after Boccaccio's well-known fictional idiot Calandrino, and so the title and the general spirit of the play allude at least as much to the most bawdy stories in the *Decameron* as to Plautus. (43)

Machiavelli's *La Mandragola* (The Mandragola, 1518) is another distinctive contribution to *commedia erudita* of the sixteenth century. It has its roots in contemporary Italian life and is important in several ways. The play defies the neo-classicism of his predecessors like their five-act structure and their adherence to the three unities. "Machiavelli seems to have difficulty in stretching his successful beffa over five acts and intersperse a good deal of carnivalesque farce" (Brand 53). The play is an exciting blend of farce, witticism, and salacious humour. Segal describes:

Mandragola is wholly "Machiavellian". Towards this end the author has modified the classical form to suit his needs. Its moral or immoral sympathies mirror the author's own political philosophy, which has been articulated in such simplistic epitomes as "the end justifies the means," "might makes right," and "the only sin is ignorance." Nothing happens by chance. There is no Tyche, no felicitous *cognitio*, and no *deus ex machine*. It is all scheming, knowledge, and manipulation. (263)

At another place, Segal mentions, "Machiavelli represents a moment in history where classical tradition meet Florentine cunning and the result is a theatrical masterpiece" (272). Machiavelli's lesser known productions are, *Andria*; adaptation of Terence's *Andria* and *Clizia*; adaptation of Plautus' *Casina*.

The most exuberant and highly original comic playwrights from the period are Pietro Aretino (1492-1556) and Angelo Beolco (II Ruzzante, 1502-42). They are held to be the true heralds of invective theatre. They acknowledge no convention and are no longer bound to Plautine and Terentian models. Aretino is attributed as the writer of five lewd comedies; *L'Ipocrito*, *Marescalco*, *Cortegiana*, *La Talanta* and *Il Filosofo*. Expressing his opinion about these plays Whitfield says, "Though he is capable in snatches of the most comic *trouvailles*, especially in verbal coruscation, he

cannot construct with any sense of unity or cohesion. The real merit is in the evocation of contemporary life by vivid dialogue” (151).

As an actor-dramatist Ruzante is known for his rustic comedies based on the lives of peasants, written in Pauduan dialect. He is a dramatist of greater power and originality than his contemporaries. He brings variety and vitality to the Italian stage. His characters include the exploited peasants by rich and powerful landlords. Among his works, *La moscheta* is considered the best followed by *La fiorina*, *L'anconitana*, *La Piovana* and *La vaccaria*. The theatrical character of Ruzante is the famous creation of Beolco. Theatre of Ruzante intersects the classical models of Renaissance humanists and the popular tradition of entertainment.

Academy of the Intronati in Siena holds a special position in the development of modern Plautine Comedy. Alessandro Piccolomini is a prominent playwright of the Sienese school of a comic drama whose *Alessandro* (1543) is considered to be the spirit of the academy. *L'ingannati*, a collective effort of the academy's playwrights and Bargagli's *La pellegrina* are an important addition to Intronati repertoire.

Although comedy dominated the Italian stage throughout the sixteenth century, there were attempts to revive a more serious form of drama. The first regular tragedy put on the Italian stage is Giangiorgio Trissino's *Sofonisba* (1514) in blank verse and without distinction between acts and scenes. It is structured around Greek model and is an epitome of Aristotelian principles in its use of chorus, song, spectacle and the three unities. Irrespective, of criticism or negative assessment of its contemporaries the play is significant because it served as a model for the first generation of playwrights followed by Giovanni Rucellai, Alessandro Pazzi de' Medici and Lodovico Martelli.

The chief promoter of Latin model was Giambattista Giraldi by explicitly imitating it in *Orbecche* (1541). This is called the *Titus Andronicus* of the Italian stage. He evolved a new theory for both comedy and tragedy in *Discorso sulle comdie e sulle tragedie* (1554), proposing Terence and Seneca as models for comedy and tragedy respectively. He emphasised that both genres should be structured on the lines of Roman models. Later, he tended towards a novel idea of tragedy with a happy ending. As Whitfield maintains:

Orbecche does not bound Giraldi's horizon, and having launched the horror-tragedy, and written in the *Discorso sulle comedie e sulle tragedie* the theory of tragedy, he turned towards an intermediate type, the tragedy with a happy ending, satisfying the spectator with the punishment of villainy and the simultaneous liberation of the righteous. (154)

Sperone Speroni's *Canace* (1546) ignited new controversy concerning its theme and the characters. The play is centred on the incestuous love of Canace and her brother Macareus and was harshly criticised by its contemporaries as it was thought inappropriate for a tragic subject. Later instances are, Aretino's *Orazia* (1546), *Marianna* (1565) by Lodovico Dolce, *Dalida* (1572) of Luigi Groto and *Aeripanda* (1591) of Antonio Decio.

All the Renaissance tragedies drew either from Greek or Latin sources as they were the only viable models to imitate blended with contemporary events. Moreover, the translations of Classical drama contributed a lot in the flowering of the neoclassical drama as it acquainted the neoclassical artists with classical models and types. The knowledge of Greek and Roman plays encouraged the Renaissance artists to produce a more original work.

However, the more original and indigenous form which is considered to be the soul of Italian theatre is Commedia dell'Arte. It is an improvisational theatre which has profoundly influenced European theatre as well as European culture. It is pan-Italian theatrical form from the sixteenth century which can be called the heyday of Commedia dell'Arte. Bawdiness, raucousness, debauchery, directness, and immediacy are the characteristic features of commedia. These comic routines of commedia are signified through *lazzi*. It is a theatre of the situation with its stock characters – the young lovers, the miserly merchant, the pedant and the braggart soldier, wearing a mask and using improvised dialogue. Unlike, the conventional neoclassical theatre which generally relies on scripted texts, this particular genre represents a non-scripted and empirical theatre. This is to say that it does not derive from a literary text but from practice. "The Commedia dell'Arte is a form of theatre based on a combination of dialogue and action, on spoken monologue and performed gesture, and not on mime alone" (Fo 12). Another remarkable achievement of commedia is that it encouraged the spectators to participate in the theatrical action. It was an actor's theatre in which actor dominated the stage.

The itinerant nature of commedia performers grew into several professional commedia troupes who travelled across Europe exerting a great influence on European comic tradition which drew heavily on the Commedia dell'Arte. A few honourable mentions are the Confidenti, the Accessi, the Uniti, the Gelosi and the Fideli. For the next two centuries, commedia had been a tour de force not only in Italy but throughout Europe but gradually slipped into obscurity.

A new interest in Commedia dell'Arte had been revived in the post-war period with the works of Giorgio Strehler, Paoli Grassi, Jacques Lecoq, Ameleto Sartori and Dario Fo informed by commedia. The twentieth century theatre experimentalists, Gordon Craig, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Max Reinhardt and Bertolt Brecht were also impressed by commedia. It found its admirers in The San Francisco Mime Troupe, The Bread and Puppet theatre and Theatre du Soleil who exploited commedia as a comic critique of the status quo.

Much of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century Italian stage was dominated by musical drama, an important outgrowth of which can be seen in *Opera buffa* (comic opera). The rising interest in opera and overemphasis on scenography and theatre mechanics had a debilitating influence on the scripted drama. Besides, entertainment there were financial reasons for the popularity of opera as Banham records, "The market for opera librettos was considerable and paid better than did writing for the regular theatre" (547). The financial prospect promised by this new genre of musical entertainment led to democratic theatrical/dramatic activity as we can see how the rise of professional dramatists working independently with longer in need of a patron.

The eighteenth-century Italian stage was sought to be reformed from the crude and vulgar entertainment of the Commedia which had almost eclipsed the regular drama in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. A decisive step was taken by Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793) who dedicated himself to the cause. He attempted to discipline the lewdness of the improvised players and to rehabilitate the Italian stage with regular drama. His focus was to reaffirm the role of the dramatist in Italian theatre. He replaced the low farcical entertainments with a drama based on contemporary events and characters. He has produced a considerably large body of works consisting of prose and verse composed either in dialect or standard Italian.

Among his Venetian dialect plays, *Le baruffe chiozzotte* (The Chioggian Squabbles, 1760), *I rusteghi* (The Boors, 1760) and *Il campiello* (The Little Square, 1776) are distinguished. His good-humoured comedies comprise of, *Il servitor di due padrone* (The servant of Two Masters, 1746), *Due gemelli veneziani* (The Venetian Twins, 1747) and *Il ventaglio* (The Fan, 1763).

Goldoni's commitment to reform the Italian stage and his dislike for the commedia has antagonized his contemporary Carlo Gozzi who did not at all appreciate Goldoni's idea and aspired to restore the commedia back to the Italian stage. He introduced a wholly new type of drama inspired by far-fetched events and stories.

Nothing exceptional was produced by the writers of tragedy in the eighteenth century. They followed the same old line of production. The establishment of Accademia dell' Arcadia (Academy of Arcadia) in the 1690s was an attempt to unfetter tragedy from the past restrictions and to expand its horizon. Scipione Maffei's *Merope* (1713) a verse tragedy, is a masterpiece of the era which led the way for the later reform of the Italian tragedy. The greatest among Italian writers of tragedy is perhaps Vittorio Alfieri. As Banham articulates:

If Goldoni was the greatest Italian dramatist of the eighteenth century, the most highly esteemed serious dramatist in Italy by the beginning of the next was Vittorio Alfieri: his independent political and patriotic stance caught the mood of the times, and helped to fuel that search for a national as opposed to a local or regional identity that lay at the heart of the Risorgimento. He sought to fashion a language and a structure for serious drama, and to bring to it intellectual and literary dignity. (548)

In his attempt to purify the Italian tragedy he looked to the Latin and French paradigms and "Sought more to refine the received literary tradition than to make any radical theatrical innovations" (Banham 548). He excluded sub-plot and chorus and concentrated on the development of a single major action. His characters are flat, therefore, remain the same from the beginning to the end. *Cleopatra* (1775) is Alfieri's first tragedy. His best is *Saul* (1782) and *Mirra* (1784-86?) which have survived more as literary pieces than theatrical pieces. Alfieri's drama stems from contemporary events and issues.

The struggle for national unification and independence of Italy in the nineteenth century had a bearing on theatre which was imbued with the spirit of revolt against foreign occupation, political disintegration, intellectual retardation and the unstable economy as well as against French classicism. But theatre in Italy was still lacking in ingenuity and vitality. To quote Banham “It cannot be said that cultural ferment generated any strikingly original or vital new drama and for much of the century the theatre was dominated by translations, adaptations or imitation of French melodrama or well-made play” (549). He reiterates:

The achievement of political independence and unification from 1861 led to intermittent attempts by central government to stimulate the growth of a national drama in the Italian language by offer of official competitions and monetary prize but no dramatic revival followed. (Banham 549)

Some notable dramatists from the period are; Giovanni Giraud, Giuseppe Giacosa, Giovanni Battista Niccolini, and Silvio Pellico whose works enjoyed considerable success on the Italian stage. More consistent among them were Niccolini and Pellico.

D’ Annunzio’s attempt at a total theatre incorporating words, movement, music, dance and spectacle and Italian Futurist theatre towards the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century promised something new. Whereas Annunzio took the past paradigms as a source for his new model of the tragedy he wanted to provide to Italy, the Futurists rejected the traditional approach to drama/theatre, “In favour of syntheses, or highly concentrated dramatic sketches” (Banham 550). Despite the innovative measures taken by D’ Annunzio and the Futurists nothing distinctive came out. Banham provides the reason to this:

All these activities can be seen as attempts to revitalize a theatre widely acknowledged to be hidebound and unimaginative. Unfortunately, what new ideas and artistic movements could not contribute was what the Italian theatre needed, economic support. Unfortunately too, when that economic support did in some measure materialize there were political strings attached. (550)

To mention a few major productions of Annunzio; *La critta morta* (The Dead City, 1898), *Lanave* (The Ship, 1908), *La figlia di Iorio* (The Daughter of Iorio, 1904)

and his tragedies, *La Gioconda* (1899) and *Francesca da Rimini* (1901) are worth remembering.

Dramatic activity in Italy between the two world wars has been sterile with the exception of Pirandello's works. He modernised the Italian theatre though extricating it from realistic representations of his predecessors. His invention of the "theatre within the theatre" technique is a watershed moment in the evolution of modern drama. He blurs the distinction between illusion and reality in which his characters are trapped. *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), clearly captures this mood. The French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre and the absurdist Samuel Beckett were informed by Pirandellian meta-theatricality.

The post-World War II Italian stage is occupied by the major dramatic activities of Pier Paolo Pasolini and avant-garde theatre experimentalists. Their immediate concern is the fractured socio-political sensibilities of the Italians. Pasolini's major plays; *Affabulation* (1977), *Calderon* (1973), *Pilade* (1977) and *Pigsty* (1968) delve deep into the modern social, political and psychological realities. His *Affabulation* and *Pilade* are a theatrical pastiche of *Oedipus Rex* and the *Oresteia*. He is also accredited to translate Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (1960) and Plautus' *The Braggart* (1963). In addition to his dramatic writings and dramatic translations, he has also written an essay, *Manifesto for a New Theatre* (1968). Pasolini's manifesto classifies modern theatre into two types; bourgeois theatre and anti-bourgeois theatre, dubbing the former one as the Theatre of Chatter and the later one as the Theatre of Gesture or Howl respectively. He disavows both types and theorises a new theatre "Theatre of the Word", prioritizing dramatic dialogue.

Influenced by Brecht, Grotowski, Artaud and the Living Theatre, the avant-garde theatre experimentalists aimed at a theatrical medium that would effectively deal with the problems of modern Italian society. Giuliano Vasilico, Meme Perlini, and Carmelo Bene are foremost Italian avant-garde artists.

On seemingly contradictory lines with the literary theatre developed the Italian dialect theatre which has been unparalleled in its vitality and variety. Valeri expresses:

From its origins, Italian theatre developed within a strong dialectic between two seemingly contradictory currents. The literary tradition, in which is the

performance event is based on a scripted text, includes writers such as Seneca, Tasso, Alfieri, and, more recently, Pasolini and his *Theatre of Words*. On the other hand, there is a popular comic theatre, steeped in an oral tradition and enriched by the vast expressive resources of Italian regional dialects. (19)

Dialect theatre is representative of the Italian oral tradition divided along with regional lines giving expression to indigenous experiences. To follow Haller:

Italy's linguistic division also promoted a lively dialect theatre, with regional traditions that began to develop during the Renaissance and continued to thrive through the twentieth century. After all, the languages closest to the people's heart were the dialects; they lent themselves for puns and punch lines that could provoke both laughter and tears. This explains why Italy's dialect theatre stands out after poetry as the most productive genre both in terms of the number of printed texts, manuscripts and performances, and of its importance vis-à-vis the literary canon in Tuscan. (40)

Since the dialect was the language of social communication its use enabled the playwrights to connect with people and their culture which in turn gave Italian theatre linguistic and thematic variety. It combined entertainment with social satire.

Originating from the colloquial style of Plautus, continuing with the rustic comedies of Ruzante and Goldoni's Venetian dialect plays to the twentieth-century Neapolitan works of Eduardo De Filippo, dialect theatre exemplifies the oral tradition.

This oral tradition had profoundly influenced Fo, providing him with necessary theatre techniques and acting skills. The theatre of Fo intersects between the literary and oral traditions. "Within this fertile contradiction, this dialectic of opposites, is the theatrical experience of Dario Fo, actor, and playwright with roots in popular oral culture, whose theatrical activities are the source of debates and conflicts, both old and new" (Valeri 19). This contradictions of tradition and modernity in Fo's theatre projects the conflict between popular and patrician culture.

3.4 Summing Up

Fo's invincible criticism of Italian establishment and his searing political commitment resounds Gramsci. He wielded theatre as a weapon to counter the cultural hegemony of the Italian upper class and to perpetuate the proletarian hegemony by retrieving

their culture. The rapier wit and sombreness of his performances have dual functions of entertaining and instructing audiences on prevalent social discrepancies. Provoking people's conscience and to raise their consciousness is the overriding concern of Fo contextualised in the working class struggle for hegemony.

The theatrical activity of Fo is indispensably aligned to the revolutionary struggle of the Italian proletariat against the socio-political and ecclesiastical powers. The expediency of his dramatic art can be judged by the role it plays in the political agitation and education of the marginalized community. His theatre is a tribute to all those who have a peripheral existence.

The revolutionary structure of Fo's plays is inspired by the militant working class movement and the pressing demand for social, political and historical change. He was well aware of the fact that revolution can be achieved only when peoples' minds are transformed. Political awareness, therefore, remains all-important to his agitational, indecent and raucous performances. They contribute to the social, psychological and intellectual emancipation of the suppressed section of the society.

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