CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION
Conclusion

The brochure, brought out during the premiere of Ratan Thiyam’s *Nine Hills, One Valley* at the Festivals of Arts on 26 October, 2005, at India International Centre (IIC), New Delhi, underlined the quintessential aspects of Ratan Thiyam and his works:

> Writer, director, designer, musician, painter and actor, a man who wears many hats, Ratan Thiyam is best recognized today as one of the most important theatre directors on the international scene. Renowned for its disciplined performance, practice, spectacular aural and visual aesthetics, and potent thematic explorations, Thiyam’s work has placed him in the league of men like Peter Brook, Tadao Suzuki, and Jerzy Grotowski. (2005, n.p.)

Celebrated as one of the ‘contemporary theatre Gurus’, (Jason Zinoman, n.p.), Ratan Thiyam was born on 20th Jan 1948 to a culturally eminent family of Manipur. As a son of parents who happened to be great exponents of classical Manipuri dance form, Ratan Thiyam’s exposure to the store house of traditional Manipuri culture happened quite early which later enriched his plays as the most significant resources. He has been an accomplished performer of Manipuri dance, a painter with immense talent and mastery, a writer as well as a regular contributor to various magazines and journals as a drama critic. He is also known for his deep knowledge on music, especially Hindustani classical music.

Manipur, the land Ratan Thiyam belongs to, is characterised by myriad political clamours as well as conflict and violence, but its cultural history is a long chronicle of
rich artistic endeavours. Conflict and violence are the features not only of Manipur, but of the whole of contemporary world. The world is gradually being annihilated by conflict and violence, and human civilization is in jeopardy. Thiyam, as a sensible human being, is highly concerned with human predicament in the contemporary society which is essentially dominated by man-made evils. This concern for universal experience of man with anxiety prompted Ratan Thiyam to set up his famous Chorus Repertory Theatre (CRT) in 1976 in a sprawling two acre valley on the outskirts of Imphal that has been the nerve centre of Thiyam’s theatrical œuvres ever since.

Intensely aware of the dislocation of human beings from the native locale in a world haunted by violence and strife, Ratan Thiyam’s works become compelling tales of intense humane experience. He tries to seek solace through the reinvention of the lost cultural roots. Therefore, native myths and traditions are vital theatrical components in Ratan Thiyam which have provided a unique dimension to the content and structure of his theatre. Thiyam revisits the sites of native mythology and history to invent his themes and characters, construct his plot and design the form of his theatre. In her essay, “The Theatre of Ratan Thiyam”, Kavita Nagpal, an eminent drama critic, comprehensively defines Ratan Thiyam and his theatre:

Contemporary in thought, technically dashing, with themes featuring universal concerns expressed via a dramatic idiom rooted in tradition, yet inventively creative and continuously experimental is perhaps an appropriate description of Ratan Thiyam’s theatre in brief. In play after play, these elements surface skilfully placed in context to time, concern and content. Another distinctive feature is the connection to his social milieu and how it transcends Manipur to include the world. (2004 n.p.)

The present study has been undertaken with a view to investigating into Ratan Thiyam’s skilful manoeuvring with traditions, myths and history as well as his
treatment of all pervading violence in some of his select plays. The study has also tried to highlight on Thiyam’s hope for a better future in a world ruined by conflict and violence.

The introductory chapter attempts to trace the history of Indian theatre, the history Manipuri theatre and of Manipur as well. In doing so, it has tried to contextualize Ratan Thiyam in the landscape of Manipuri theatre and also in the larger context of Indian theatre highlighting his significant role and position as a theatre activist in both forms of theatre. The chapter has also incorporated the issues and aspects of Thiyam’s theatre which have been dealt with in the present study. There is also a brief review of some of the related literatures, and the limitations of the present study.

Indian theatre has almost two thousand and five hundred years of uninterrupted history. From the rudimentary ritual dance forms of our ancestors, gradually evolved the sophisticated Sanskrit drama sometime between 4th century BC and 2nd century BC. It continued to be very popular till the 10th century AD when the first phase of Indian drama, that is, the classical Sanskrit drama phase, came to an end. The popular and significant playwrights of this classical phase are Ashvaghosha, Bhasa, Kalidasa, Sudraka, Bhavabhuti, etc. Alongside the emergence of Sanskrit drama there emerged another work of utmost value and importance sometime between 4th and 2nd century. It is Bharata’s the Natyashastra, the most comprehensive and quintessential treatise on Indian dramaturgy which embodies all the aspects of traditional Indian theatre.

The later playwrights neither had the skill of their predecessors nor their compassion. Meanwhile, the Prakrit languages, the languages of the common masses, were beginning to produce their own literatures. Also following certain historical
reasons, the glorious tradition of classical Sanskrit theatre gradually declined by the 10th
century AD paving way to the second phase of Indian theatre, that is the Medieval
Tradition (10th - 17th century). The Medieval Tradition is characterized by an upsurge of
regional language literatures. They could not produce dramatic works comparable to the
Sanskrit classics, however, folk and ritualistic theatres flourished during this period.
This is the period when a significant socio-religious reform movement evolved in the
form of Bhakti or Neo-Vaishnavite Movement. This swept across the subcontinent. As a
result, rituals, music, dance, theatre became more participatory and vibrant. Each
regional theatre had its own myths, music, dance, songs, rituals, masks, performance
texts etc. which made it a distinct variety from others. Theatre of such vast variety had a
prolific as well as dominant presence among the communities. Western realistic theatre
heralded the modern phase of Indian theatre in the colonial period. The establishment of
Western-style proscenium playhouses in major cities like Mumbai and Kolkata in the
1860s marked the beginning of Modern theatre in India.

After the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the British colonial rule got consolidated.
However, the Sepoy mutiny in 1857 marked a new phase in the history of colonial
India. Soon after the mutiny, the Britishers had brought a whole new dimension to their
rule in India. Thereafter, they focused not only on ruling India politically, but also
culturally. As a part of the project, they had established universities in Calcutta (1857),
Bombay (1857) and Madras (1857). Similarly, this was the time they had imported the
Western proscenium theatre, one of the most powerful media of mass entertainment.
Such companies performed not only English plays, but also ancient Sanskrit plays in
translation. The newly introduced English plays performed in proscenium playhouses
become a major source of entertainment for upper-class elite people and folk theatres
remained limited to the lower-class people.
In the 19th century theatre-going was commercialized and theatre was turned into a commodity rather than a community event related to religious occasions and annual harvest festivals of agrarian Indian society. Business potential of this new form led many Parsee businessmen of the then Bombay to invest on it forming what is known as Parsee Natak Company or Company Natak in short. Another such form was Marathi Sangeet Natak. It blended several elements from older traditions with Western elements and evolved a sophisticated, operatic form of theatre around 1853. With the advent of Hindi cinema in 1920s, Company Natak or Marathi Sangeet Natak had to move away gradually.

Modern Indian theatre is “a product of colonial culture” (Awasthi, 48). Colonial theatre was alien to the Indian dramatic tradition. Consequently, there occurred a resurgence of Indian drama just after Independence. A number of playwrights and directors turned to various native performance traditions along with Sanskrit aesthetic theory to create an indigenous non-realistic style of production which could be called “Indian theatre”. This new experimental theatre of contemporary India is christened as “theatre of roots” of which Ratan Thiyam is a major exponent. It has enabled Indian theatre to formulate a quintessentially Indian form deviating from the Western mode of theatre. In fact, after Independence a new cultural imperative arrived to define modern Indian theatre. It became a necessity to rediscover or reconstitute a theatrical tradition of India. This is where theatre of roots became a cultural signpost for engaging with the exercise to construct a fundamentally Indian form.

Ratan Thiyam is one of the key figures to have taken up the theatre of roots project at a different dimension altogether. Unlike Karanth and Panikkar, Thiyam belongs to a marginal location. Secondly, theatre of roots demands the incorporation of
native performance elements as the key components. Manipur, in the pan Indian cultural landscape, is a periphery. Thiyam has not only initiated a pan Indian theatre movement from the periphery, but also legitimised the potentiality of evolving a pan Indian art movement from the cultural precincts in the margins. Thiyam, therefore, is significant not only culturally but also politically.

In Manipur, theatre originated from the ancient oral ritual of *Lai Haroaba*, an ancient fertility and ancestor worship festivals which came into being around twelfth century. Another origin is *Wari Liba*, the art of storytelling which was institutionalised in the seventeenth century. King Pamheiba’s initiation to *Vaishnavism* in the eighteenth century brought Hinduism to the land. *Vaishnava* theatre forms like *Nata Sankirtana, Raas Lila, Gosta Lila, Goura Lila* etc. flourished with pre-Hindu *Lai Haraoba* and secular forms like *Phagee Lila*. With the influence of the prevailing ones, new genres such as *Shumang Lila, Moirang Parba, Khongjom Parba, Pene Phamshak* etc. developed. Modern proscenium theatre came about in Manipur in 1905, with Friend’s Dramatic Union, under the influence of colonial theatre. Later, Manipur Drama Union (1931), Aryan Theatre (1935), Rupmahal Theatre (1943) etc. paved the way to experimental theatre in the ’70s under directors like Lokendra Arambam, Heisnam Kanhailal and Ratan Thiyam.

Thiyam’s plays reflect a set of common preoccupations which are basically linked to the lived experiences of his intimate locations. He has gone back to the epics and classical theatre to address the questions of contemporary times. His early productions like *Karnabharam, Urubhangam, Chakravyuha*, etc. have effectively interrogated some of the fundamental aspects of our present time. *Manipur Trilogy* which is an important part of the present study, reflects the deeper ambition of Ratan
Thiyam to seek answers if not in the pan Indian epics but in the discourses of native lore. This is where history and myth of Manipur resonate in his narratives paradoxically coalescing with the perpetual anxiety of violence. However, Thiyam like many great artists envisages a sense of potential retrieval, hence, despite the turmoil, there lingers a sense of hope. The present study seeks to problematize these issues which are significant signposts to define the plays of Ratan Thiyam.

“Theatre of roots”, an epithet coined by Suresh Awasthi, is “a post-independence effort to decolonize the aesthetics of modern Indian theatre by challenging the visual practices, performer spectator relationships, dramaturgical structures and aesthetic goals of colonial performance” (Erin B. Mee, 9). Awasthi categorises Ratan Thiyam as a major exponent of the movement alongside B.V. Karanth, K.M. Panikkar. The exponents of this movement turned to their roots in folk and classical traditions of performances to create a tradition of modern theatre that was Indian in nature and character. This newly created theatrical tradition help the playwrights and directors of the roots movement to transform the dramatic text into a performance text.

In fact, theatre of roots should not be misunderstood as a text. It is not. Theatre of roots is essentially a form of performance with its own grammar and syntax. It is a theatrical tradition that belongs to the directors rather than to the playwrights. The plays per se as texts do not necessarily belong to the tradition of theatre of roots but they become a part of it through a particular mode of performance. We have seen in Ratan Thiyam classical dance forms, martial art forms, native Manipuri music and musical instruments as essential components of his performance design along with specific use of lights, colour scheme, costume, scenography as well as performance space.
Thiyam performed his theatrical experimentations and innovations on the foundation of rich and varied cultural heritage of Manipur. His rootedness with his native land inspired him to experiment with and amalgamate various dramatic traditions, such as Natyashastra tradition, Western realistic tradition with native Manipuri theatre and other performance traditions. The outcome of such experimentations and amalgamation is a new performance tradition, a new theatrical idiom which is solely created by him, and it is his own idiom, his signature mark. His tradition is also marked by such qualities in Sanskrit theatrical tradition as physicality and stylization in performance. He has evolved theatre as a composite art, a kind of a total theatre amalgamating, assimilating and transmuting various composite art forms. His new theatrical idiom, which is also enriched by his exposure to the Japanese and Chinese theatre traditions and by his use of technology, brings him to the point of creating a Pan-Asian oriental theatre and bridging the gap between the West and the East.

Physicality in performance requires a different mode of training for actors than conventional rehearsals. Chorus Reparatory Theatre which Thiyam founded in 1976 has become training and polishing ground for budding theatre talents of Manipur. All the members of CRT undergo rigorous physical and vocal training in traditional performance arts such as Thang Ta, Nat Sankeertana, etc. and in traditional narrative forms such as Wari Leeba, Pena, Lairik Haiba Thiba as well as technical training in stagecraft and design.

As an exponent of the new theatre movement, he has created the new idiom of theatre which brings an aura of “Indianness” to Indian theatre and it is the prime objective behind the movement. His plays have often been selected to represent Indian
theatre in international festivals home and abroad. Thus, he is answering to the agenda of the government cultural bodies like the Sangeet Natak Academy to evolve a form of Indian theatre after Independence. This is one aspect of Thiyam’s search for roots, for identity through his theatrical enterprises.

However, a search for identity from the margin is a problematic issue. Thiyam belongs to such a geo-political space where Indian identity comes into conflict with Manipuri identity. Post independence political upheavals in Manipur bear testimony to the fact that Manipuris prefer a Manipuri identity, a Manipuri root to an Indian identity. In this context, Thiyam, like other contemporary experimental theatre activists of Manipur, is concerned with finding idioms and expressions through their works to reflect the mood of discontent, disillusionment and marginalization and to assert their Manipuri identity.

Thiyam is sometimes accused of being indifferent to the plight of his native land and its people. On the contrary, the present study reveals that despite variety of sources of his plays, Manipur with its diverse facets has always a strong presence in all his productions. In respect to the theme and content, Manipur is always the central concern, though the political message he wants to convey is sometimes at a symbolic or an allegorical level. In respect to the style and presentation, he has created his own style heavily drawing upon native Manipuri performance traditions only to assert his identity as a Manipuri. He is successful in showcasing the rich cultural heritage of Manipur not only to the Indian audience, but also to the audience abroad. He is also successful in establishing that Manipur has a unique socio-cultural lineage which is independent of the so called Indian culture. Thiyam’s exploitation and celebration of native Manipuri performance traditions is a challenge not only to the colonial aesthetic, but ironically to
Sangeet Natak Academy’s promotion of the theatre of roots as a national culture of which he has often been forwarded as a good example.

Thiyam’s preoccupation with tradition should not be misunderstood as his strict adherence to the theatrical traditions inherited from the past. Rather, he believes that theatre is an art which is changing constantly, and tries to bring about changes in his every subsequent production. In this sense, his theatre is anti-traditional or a-traditional. Tradition also means a set of doctrines, a body of knowledge on the spiritual evolution of man handed down through generations. As such, adherence to tradition can wipe out the evils that keep on inflicting humankind. Thiyam believes theatre could be conceived to be a field of study in which to confront and explore tradition. He attributes the present deplorable state of affairs of the contemporary society to the loss of tradition, to man’s deliberate avoidance of traditional knowledge in the name of modernity and modern science and technology. We turn our back to tradition and as a consequence, we suffer eternally.

During the colonial period, Indian past was revisited through mythic narratives like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. They were idealised and used as a key element to construct a unified collective identity unifying diverse populace of pre-colonial India; and to advance the concept of nationalism. Postcolonial politics have challenged the idea of India as a nation. Post-independence Indian writing uses myth and history as sources to reassess and de-idealize the past. The mythic-historical plays of Thiyam, like that of Panikkar, Karanth and Karna, take a sceptical and cynical view on heroic nationalist constructions of myth and history.

Theatre for Ratan Thiyam is a passionate enterprise. It is a means through which he nurtures his associations with the native nuances of his land. For him, theatre is not a
journey towards a distant locale; rather, it is a pilgrimage towards his home. Therefore, in Ratan Thiyam, Manipur and his theatre is essentially sustained through an umbriacal linkage. His theatre is evolved through his deep awareness of his native soil, which is fundamentally shaped by its history as well as the gnemonic contours of its mythology. After all, the meaning he keeps looking for invariably sprouts in this familiar landscape. Despite the stories having come from various classical sources, they inevitably transform into a native tale with myriad other elements of cultural rites that are deeply ingrained in the consciousness of Manipur.

Ratan Thiyam’s *Mahabharata* plays emerge out of the crisis of cultural and political identity which has been conspicuous in the colonial and pre colonial history of Manipur. He considers theatre as a political and moral critique and uses myths and histories of war and violence as a vehicle to express his protest. He is inclined to Bhasa’s *Mahabharata* plays because Bhasa, by choosing Karna (*Karnabharam*), Duryodhana (*Urubhangam, Pancharatra*) as heroes of his plays, challenges the established *Natyashastra* tradition. The heroes of his Bhasa plays and the hero of his own *Chakravyuha*, Abhimanyu are non-heroes of the great epic. As a Manipuri, Thiyam discovers an affinity with Karna and Duryodhana, whereas Abhimanyu stands for the younger generations who have been induced to suicidal acts in the name of patriotism and heroism.

Thiyam also considers myths as treasure house of knowledge and contain the just ways of the world. If understood in its proper perspective, such a myth will help man live a life of peace and harmony and the earth will turn into paradise. In the play *Wahoudok (Prologue)*, he shows the history of the evolution of human civilization from the creation of the universe based on a *Mietie* myth to the modern times. The modern
world is an antithesis of the mythic universe created by the Lord. He invokes the native myth of the creation and relooks at it from the standpoint of contemporary reality in order to search for an answer to the evils inflicting the society. Human beings forget the duties and responsibilities entrusted upon them by the Lord at the time creation and they themselves have destroyed the paradise. Knowledge and teachings encoded in such myths can help us regain the lost paradise.

History too is a major source of inspiration for Ratan Thiyam. However, his plays are not historical plays in the conventional sense of the term. He has not taken up any historical event to see its different possible interpretations and meanings. Rather, for him, history in general is a prime source of knowledge which will answer to the evils lurking in the society. While drawing on historical resources, he reinterprets history as a trajectory of civilizational continuity; he would advocate reconnecting the lost ends of history to gain intellectual freedom which can ensure a transformative society liberating itself from its present crisis.

Ratan Thiyam can be seen as an avid practitioner of what Hayden White would call, “Metahistory”, though his version of metahistory is within the limitations of an artist, in the sense that he boldly expresses his radical views on the events of the past in almost all his plays in order to create a world for the future generation which will be worth living. He tries to explore the causes destroying humans and humanity. He comments on the destructive urges of human beings throughout history in the name of power and wealth, race and nation.

Thiyam’s work reveals his deep attachment to native traditions, myths and history. He has revisited the traditions, myths and history of India in general and of
Manipur in particular, and relocated them in the context of present socio-politico-cultural milieu of Manipur and of the world around. Through the reinterpretation of myth and history and reemphasis on tradition, Thiyam brings forth issues perennial and contemporary, such as, war and violence, oppression and exploitation, anxiety and identity crisis, and so on, and searches for a solution to the evils inflicting the society. At the same time he relooks at his position, at his identity as a Manipuri and as an Indian.

The study has tried to look at Ratan Thiyam’s response, as a theatre activist, to conflict and violence which are gradually engulfing not only Manipur, but the whole of the world. When Thiyam returns to his native state Manipur after his graduation from the National School of Drama in 1974, he finds Manipur devastated by unrest and violence. He is also aware of the violence in every part of the world and anxious about the future of mankind if the present trend of violence continues unabated. Violence, therefore, becomes a recurring motif in most of his plays. For him any work of art that cannot feel the society and touch the inner self is of no value. So conflict and violence have a strong presence in all his productions.

Thiyam’s treatment of violence has been viewed from the perspective of René Girard’s mimetic model of violence. Girard (1923-2015) speaks of the mechanism that engenders conflict and violence in societies. He has explored the relationship between desire, violence and sacrifice. His theory of violence has been used to examine Thiyam’s treatment of violence in his most celebrated play *Chakravyuha*, which, in spite of its mythic content, is an enactment of the present crisis of Manipur where individuals are routinely reduced into inescapable victims, where lots of young people are being allured to suicidal acts in the name of heroism, patriotism and martyrdom.
Chakravyuha dramatises the entrapment and killing of Abhimanyu, the young son of Arjuna and Subhadra by the Saptarathis in the holy war of Kurukshetra. The central issue of the great epic is the dynastic struggle between the Kauravas and the Pandavas for the throne of Hastinapur as both the camps desire the throne. The rivalry between them began when Yudhishthira, the eldest of the Pandavas was declared the crown prince whereas Duryudhana, the eldest of the Kauravas coveted the throne. The rivalry culminates in the great battle of Kurukshetra.

The desire for the throne can be called “mimetic” as it is destructive and the cause of violence. The consequent mimetic rivalry between the Kauravas and the Pandavas leads to acquisitive rivalry as both the camps employ means both fair and foul to acquire the throne. The epic battle of Kurukshetra is the manifestation of the stage of conflictual rivalry between them. The war has already lasted for twelve days and there seems no end of it. At this juncture of conflictual rivalry, there arises a need to search for a scapegoat to be sacrificed to end the violence. Abhimanyu who stands for the younger generation is the collectively chosen victim, a scapegoat who is being sacrificed in the name of martyrdom.

He has been collectively persecuted – physically by the Kauravas and symbolically by the Pandavas. In fact, scapegoat/sacrifice motif pervades the whole play from the very beginning. Abhimanyu’s question on the way to heaven whether he is a scapegoat or a martyr discursively problematizes the paradox of violence. This is the question, Ratan Thiyam says, “every soldier in the US or Iraq or Afganistan or anywhere asks himself, and that of every young separatist who is fighting for a cause that is not his” (to Ravindran and Saple).
War and violence together with a threat of third world war have reduced human beings to a state of, what Agamben defines as, *homo sacer*, turning the experience of existence into *bare life*, bereft of the basic rights of citizenship and the protection of law. Ratan Thiyam is aware of the legal and political status of the individuals in a violence ridden universe inhabited by power mongers who incite the common people for war and violence for their own gain. The common people live in a world where an undeclared state of exception is imposed upon them without their being aware of it. In his plays, Thiyam addresses the issue where the common experience of men becomes that of living a bare life (*zoe*) against the backdrop of overwhelming violence which transforms their qualified life (*bios*) into *zoe*.

War, whether it is mythological war of the *Mahabharata* or the World Wars, whether it is intranational or international wars, whether it is ethnic violence or terrorism, it transgresses the temporal and spatial barriers in Ratan Thiyam. War has such a powerful presence and influence in Thiyam’s plays that it becomes a character, the most dreaded villain assuming the status of the sovereign having the right to proclaim a state of exception. War creates a state of exception where it multiplies its power and right to kill ignoring the citizenship, nationality of the killed and suspending their rights.

Ratan Thiyam knows the secret for achieving peace in this violence ridden world. The secret is concealed in the form of knowledge encoded in ancient traditions and myths. So he takes recourse to traditions and myths not only as mere backdrops to tell the tale of misery and sufferings of humanity, but conceives it as protagonists which actively participate in the exercise of inventing a new discourse of emancipation. He
envisages a society, a liveable one, for the future generations which will be founded on the knowledge and wisdom garnered from such traditions and myths.

The Chapter IV of the study has emphasised on Thiyam’s depiction of anxiety prevailing over the contemporary Manipuri society which also reflects the anxiety of modern man in a world devastated by conflict and violence. How Thiyam’s productions emit a ray of hope for a better future in a world of utter hopelessness has also been explored in this chapter.

The anxiety raised by almost all the plays of Thiyam is basically concerned with conflict and violence engulfing present day Manipur and rest of the world. This Manipuri society is altogether a new structure arising out of its assimilation to India and the intrusion of “Indianness” into Manipuri life. The newly emerged Manipuri society with individuals assigned with new and different roles and individuals enacting new and different roles, which is the core of Thiyam’s productions, has been analysed and interpreted in terms of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological approach to society.

Restructuring process of the Manipuri society after independence leads to, in Bourdieuan sense, formation of new fields with its new set of unstated rules (doxa), a field-habitus clash, and struggle a to accumulate capitals and occupy a position of dominance. In these newly created fields, the natives who hold capitals, particularly capitals of that of the invaders, are in a privileged position to further increase their capital and consolidate their dominance over those who do not hold; and they turn the land into a land “where might is right” (Manipur Trilogy, 86).

In such new fields, social and cultural capitals of the old fields which contributed to the structuring of the habituses of the agents have been redefined. The
entire phenomenon of changing the values of cultural capital is rendered a material manifestation, though at a highly symbolic level, in the scene in *Nine Hills, One Valley* where *Matam*, the demon, amputates the hands of the dancers performing exquisite *Bhangi* dance. *Matam* who disturbs the solemn atmosphere of *Bhangi* performance with his cruelty, symbolizes the alien cultural forces (a tool of social dominance) trying to destroy Manipur’s native culture and tradition which means destroying the atmosphere of overwhelming peace and tranquillity. In the conflict between the two cultures and the subsequent change of fields where field-habitus clash occurs, the young generation is the worst sufferer. They become vulnerable and can easily be trapped, used and exploited in the power games.

Some people, on the other hand, very apprehensive of the new society and its constituent fields which do not match their habituses, vow to preserve the old order and structure, the old fields. The group of natives which holds capitals in the newly constructed fields and consequently occupies a place of dominance often uses “symbolic violence” on the majority of the population in pursuit of more capital and power, and engage them in such activities which can be termed as ethnic conflicts. The majority is unaware of the symbolic violence exerted upon them by the minority and believes the social order as legitimate. In a destabilized and chaotic structure, the minority of the population has had enough opportunity to accumulate capitals of all sorts and raise their position in the power structure. *Chakravyuha* manifests in a very subtle albeit symbolic manner, the mechanism of symbolic violence being operated in a society in order to persuade the majority by the minority to be ready to sacrifice their lives in their (the minority) tactic to acquire an accumulate more capitals of all sorts.
Thiyam is greatly perturbed by the present trend of violence and destruction. His art which translates his experiences of violence and destruction on stage in the form of performances is exploited as a powerful medium of propagating his vision of peace and harmony in a universe raven with strife and violence. He is not a pessimist, he is hopeful that humanity will make a right choice and act accordingly to regain the lost paradise which is his goal as exemplified by his productions.

Thiyam’s plays ritualise this sense of hope as the moment of embarking on a journey towards a new horizon of peace and tranquillity. Such rituals of hope as executed in his plays are created by him; they are his own rituals created in accordance with the message he wants to convey. The mythological Mothers in the Epilogue of *Nine Hills, One Valley* affirm in unison the journey towards peace by ritually enkindling the lamp of peace:

In the vast spherical world
to bring peace
to make human beings live in harmony
to put an end to war
to let the dwellers of hills and valley coexist
in this land
encircled by nine concentric ranges of hills
let us place lamps as offerings for peace. (*Manipur Trilogy*, 106-107)

And the final moving image of the nine hills twinkle with lights and the valley filled with lamps conveys rays of hope at a time of utter darkness.

As an experienced and accomplished artist, Ratan Thiyam knows the responsibility of art and the artist at the time of crisis besetting the society. He is aware that when the society is in peril, the artist’s duty is not only to set a goal and indicate the right way to emancipate the society from the vicious grip, but also to have confidence in
himself and in his art to motivate the people to desire for the goal set by him and follow the routes discovered by him.

Discharging the duties of a conscientious theatre activist, Thiyam has, through his art, warned the members of the society against the evils of self-destructing war and violence, and at the same time he articulates a mission for peace to be followed by everyone through the paths discovered by him if one wants to live peacefully in a world of disturbance and restlessness. He is also confident that his theatre has the power to transform the society by instilling into the minds of its members his visions of peace and the ways and means for achieving it. The new knowledge derived from myths and traditions, he believes, will enlighten us and help us build a land of peace and happiness.

Scientific research not only contributes a drop to the sea of knowledge, but also opens up new avenues for further investigation and exploration. After making a humble attempt in the present study to inquire into Ratan Thiyam’s handling of history, myth, violence and hope in a few of his select plays, the scholar felt that there were other unexplored areas in the repertoire of his plays which could be the subject matter for further investigation. The present study is limited to four of his plays due to language constraint. With the knowledge of Manipuri language, similar study on an extensive scale can be conducted encompassing all his productions.

In Thiyam’s productions, mesmerising performances overshadow the dramatic texts. The performance aspect of his plays with various performance traditions blended together can be another area for further investigation. Thiyam’s work is a fusion of aesthetics and politics. How he transmutes his radically political views with his aesthetics can be a good scope for exploration.
A comparative study between Thiyam and any one of the major exponents of the roots movement, namely, K. N. Panikkar and B. V. Karanth in relation to their aesthetics can be a good area for further research. Again a comparative study between Thiyam and any one of his contemporary Manipuri theatre activists and major voices of Manipur, namely, L. Arambam and H. Kanhaiyal in regard to their political views and standpoints, and aesthetics can be undertaken.

WORKS CITED


