FOLK THEATRE, RELIGION & POLITICS

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Mapping Bengali Jatra of Eastern India

SHARMILA CHHOTARAY

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY
Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla

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Dedicated to
MANILA
my sister!

Contents

Preface

A book on Bengali jatra has long been overdue. It is not that writings are scanty, but an account of a world of Bengali jatra in its entirety is absent. Jatra, one of the most popular travelling theatre forms originated most probably in the undivided Bengal and still thriving in its bordering regions such are Odisha, Bihar, Assam, Manipur and Tripura. Although all jatra forms in Eastern India share a great deal of commonalities and mutual influences among themselves till date, they express differences in regional attributes beyond languages and non-theatrical genres such as folktale, folk song, legend, and epic. The larger impact however on all jatras of Eastern India from Bengal jatra. Solely because of Bengal has been the center of cultural renaissance since 16th century onwards and more particularly since late 19th century and early 20th century, "the harmonizing elements from both Occidental and Oriental cultures Tagore said 'European thoughts and literary forms found immediate hospitality in Bengali literature from the very beginning of their contact with our mind". (Sumanta Banerjee 1989:5). Jatra continued to grow, transform and reinvented in every periods of history in Bengal.

The primary concern of this volume is to contextualize Bengali jatra within a changing social structure at different historical junctures. A meticulous historiography facilitates to explore the contemporaneity of the cultural phenomenon evolved in several eras in the book. It is argued that some cultural forms become dying traditions or are preserved as 'living fossil'; however, folk arts do not disappear but

undergo a mutation. An inherent reflexivity allows the addition of new elements without discarding the past. It thus ensures a coexistence of different stages in a given time and space. Traditional theatre has often resisted modern mass media and established itself as a dynamic form, contesting the idea that folk culture 'will be eclipsed by the mass culture'. The perceived dichotomy of the rural/urban, oral/written, Great/Little, tradition/modern, sacred/profane and folk/classical doesn't hold much water in South Asia, as the above categories operate and exist in a continuum, both among the peasantry and urban.

As an evolving performing art, it traverse several types of folklore like moving from ritualistic processions to secular plays with a pronounced drama element; *pālā,* performing texts, are particularly important for the jatra's identity and continuity. Jatra can be placed between the two dominant cultures, namely folk and elite (*bhadralok*, in case of colonial Bengal); the term "popular", which denote certain amount of mass culture slowly emerging in case of this genre of art. Hugely dependent upon the secondary literature, the study largely adopted the orientalist approach of reading the history of the performing arts. It is truly fascinating to historicize a form that has deep and long connections with varied religious, folk and political changes in pre-colonial Bengal. Since then it undergoes considerable changes until the emergence of modern theatrical jatra in early 1900s in colonial Bengal and has been a flourishing time of jatra till today's usage of jatra by political, commercial and professional stages.

The jatra performances combine narratives, dance, music and histrionic arts, and entertain millions of audiences every year. Incorporating elements from classical texts of the Vedic age to various folk performing forms, jatra has evolved in a continuity through varied social conditions that rightly raises the concerns of nationalism and indigeneity in its aesthetics. From the medieval Kṛṣṇa jatra of Vaishnavism to the emergence of theatrical jatra in colonial times performed

with a dab of European modernity and nationalist concerns, it also incorporated Marxist ideology (IPTA), before it became more cinematic in the present era. Under the influence of modern Bengali dramas, jatras began to incorporate more prose and structured plots. The operatic mythological and devotional character of jatra palas shrunk, to make place for the growing interest in social and family stories. A new generation of Jatra palakars or playwrights like Bhairabh Gangopadhyay, Brajendra Kumar Dey and Phanibhusan Bidyabinod responded to this demand for contemporary relevance and revived the form, bringing it to new heights of success in the 1960s. Drawing heavily from proscenium theaters of Kolkata, the action is melodramatic, marked by the delivery and pitch of the typical jatra actors, different from the realistic dialogue delivery in modern drama. Jatra was quick to adopt these innovations in its lengthy performances and continued to refine them. The changes can be observed in performance settings, acting techniques, make up, lighting and sound properties.

Another question is about the political economy of jatra. As its patronage shifted from people to zamindars, and then the middle-class in colonial periods and the emerging entrepreneurial class in Calcutta of post-Independent India, in its popularity it has surpassed cinema, television and other forms of media. The focus on the changes in aesthetics around the 1990s, when new entertaining elements like Bollywood gimmicks, cinema and television actors entered commercial jatra enterprises. The establishment of state patronage, such as the Paschimbanga Jatra Academy, aims to preserve the century-old folk theatre.

In this context, my research aims to trace the shifting patterns of modernities in their aesthetic and material dimensions -hybridity and intersectionality, and, despite facing rejection from the Bhadralok, made its home in the rural moffusil and lower classes of urban Bengal. The methodology of the study is a combination of fieldwork made: interviews with actors and scholars, watching and

documentation of performances, analysis of *jatrapala* texts and various paraphernalia and profound readings with an aim to draw a historical evolution of jatra as a genre, it's regional specific features, relations to the professional theater, to the performing activity of various movements – artistic and political (as *swadeshi jatra*) and theater persons. The sources – printed *jatrapala* texts, audio and visual information, recorded interviews with actors, scholars, vcds as well as live performances – have been useful in exploring intricasies and its continuity among its rural as well as urban audiences.

Acknowledgment

The journey of writing this monograph on Bengali jatra was challenging, especially considering the extensive scholarship on Bengali literature. During my two year stint at IIAS from 2018 to 2020, first and foremost I thank the selection board to narrow down my ambitious project on jatra in a large canvas. I sincerely thank T.K Oommen and Laxmi Subramanium for their comments and timely suggestion.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Jatra is a traveling, popular folk theatre genre that is prevalent today in Odisha, Tripura, Assam and Bangladesh. It most probably originated in undivided Bengal. The core of this book is of a historical nature, broadly traversing five eras. The narrative begins around the first century BCE, in light of comparable performance culture that has vague but not insignificant documentation. It then progresses to the sixteenth century, when jatra might have taken shape, even though specific details remain largely speculative. The nineteenth century provides actual documentation of the genre as we understand it today, flourishing in various forms throughout the twentieth century and continuing to the present day. From a historical perspective, jatra can be understood as a folk form—a religious procession that has evolved into a modern mass entertainment.. There has never been one jatra, but its basic from has undergone multiple metamorphoses, particularly with the emergence of Bhakti, under colonial rule, during the rise of Indian modernity, as well as nationalism and eventually in a capitalist market economy. With the onset of modernization and urbanization, the *pālā* (performing texts) gradually shifted from mythological to secular, and Bengali jatra flourished in a transformed avatar capable of responding to social changes and capturing the imagination of the masses. Similarly, the old musical form evolved into dramatic and action-oriented performances adapting to new categories of theatre and mass media. Jatra, nonetheless, remained critical of itself and of the social, cultural and political life in Bengal.

This book aims to chart out and contextualize over five hundred years of the evolution of Bengali jatra, a popular folk travelling theatre genre. While tracing its evolution and revival in West Bengal, from the 16th till the 21st century, this research focuses on the survival of a performing art tradition within the context of continuity and change. Jatra, which is also prevalent in Bihar, Odisha, Tripura, Assam, Manipur and present-day Bangladesh, is a 'ubiquitous and shape shifting form, popular in rural as well as urban centres of Bengal' (Bhattacharya 2018:1). Jatra has its origins in a historical era which has limited documentation. What has been passed down to us through various branches of performance culture provides insight into what it might once have been in the past and the transformations it has undergone to evolve into the modern avatar of jatra, which lies at the centre of this study. Jatra underwent multiple transformations at different junctures, broadly, with the emergence of Bhakti, amid colonial rule, during the rise of Indian modernity as well as nationalism and eventually in a capitalist market economy. Nevertheless it retained a distinct character and language. Putting its major objectives in brief, this study seeks to:

- trace the origin and evolution of jatra in Bengal from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century
- understand the political economy of commercial jatra and politics of political jatra
- access the contemporary challenges and changes of jatra in West Bengal

Methodology: Data Collection and Analysis

The study is based on primary material, which include printed jatrapala texts, posters, tickets, photos and audio-visuals, as well as recorded interviews with actors, scholars as well along with videos of performances. Secondary literature comprises academic studies, journals and newspaper clippings. For my research I have consulted the

Natyashodh Sansthan, the Paschimbanga Jatra Academy, the National Library and the personal collections of jatra scholars like Prabhat Das and Meghdoot Bandopadhyay in Kolkata. Furthermore, I have visited the Archives and Research Center for Ethnomusicology in Gurgaon, as well as the library and archives of the Sangeet Natak Academy in New Delhi. Interviews with select company producers and owners, actors, directors and close observation of performances have been the methods employed to understand the politics, popularity and survival of the jatra.

Etymology of the Term Jatra

Contemplating its contemporary meaning, the name or term *jātrā* (as transcribed from Bangali) may appear rather indistinct but does indicate towards its historic precursor. The etymology of jatra or *yātrā* in Sanskrit translates, among other things, as pilgrimage, journey or procession (Monier-Williams et al. 1960:849; see as well Chattopadhyaya1974:132; Richmond et al. 1990:241; Yajnik1933:54-55). 'A "yātrā" originally may have been such a procession as was customary with worshippers and devotees at the time of the regular festivals of their own god or cult. Some kind of musical performance and sympathetic dancing must have formed a part of the procession' (Guha-Thakurta1930:8). Even though with a regional marker, a similar definition is given by Ananda Lal (2009:245) giving jatra as the '[b]est-known form of travelling Bengali theatre. In older times, procession at a religious festival where a community of devotees danced and sang in several voices, perhaps while carrying idols, was such a specialised "journey".' At some juncture, which will be discussed in the following chapters, these musical processions gained independent character and purpose. As for modern day jatra, of far greater importance than the name are the labels, such as folk or popular, that come along the performance genre.

Situating Jatra between Folk and Popular Theatre

'What is a Popular Folk Travelling Theatre?' might be the first question a reader would ask. As mentioned earlier, underlying this research is the concept of continuity and change, where 'folk' and 'popular' represent two open ends in the ongoing evolution of jatra. The terms 'folk', 'modern' and 'traditional' have developed multi-dimensional interpretations from various perspectives over the past fifty years of folklore studies and sociology (see Anttonen2016). The idea of 'folk' as Johann Gottfried[1] Herder suggests, is closely associated with one's distinct cultural identity, and folk culture lays its authenticity from the experiences and history of a particular community.

In the historical context considered in this study, the concept of 'folk' only existed vis-à-vis modernity, which required this category to characterize a state of society it succeeded. The folk society was primarily pre-industrial or rural and was characterized by a distinctive way of handling, perceiving and thinking that set it apart from other societies. *Modern* here, encompases both temporal modernity as well as the concept of innovation, a quality in contrast to tradition (Anttonen2016: 37). This is not to, however, to feed into the 'dichotomy of modernity and tradition [that] constructs a historical narrative according to which social life and societies are first based on tradition, signifying thus static cultural continuity and conservatism, while modernity follows tradition, signifying cultural change and the end of tradition.' (Anttonen2016: 34) From a contemporary perspective, 'folk' is often unwittingly treated as a pure or unchanging form upheld by tradition. In performance, however, very few forms remained unchanged over time, as will become evident in the following chapters. Particularly significant is the transition into modernity in India. But what happens to folk art in such a scenario? In the 'classical' context of folklore studies, folk culture either perishes without its natural habitat or comes under

patronage that alters its mode of production and perception, resulting in loss of authenticity (and various other values). This circumstance forms the subject of most publications that deal with folk art in a modern or contemporary context. To reduce the impact of modernity to some extent, it can be assumed that the corruption or decline of a performance culture must have been perceived at an earlier, now historical, contemporary point of view. Either way, there is little risk of being pro- or antimodern in attitude since this historical narrative follows the concepts of continuity and change and is not an attempt to pinpoint a specific state of a performance form at a particular historical moment.

The third scenario for the fate of folk in modern times is twofold and a little more complex as a process: either the folk form assimilates from modernity what it needs to survive, or it is assimilated into a form that modernity has brought about. In a way, modern jatra might be seen as belonging to the third category, but it is more appropriate to say it emerged as a new avatar when incorporating novelties brought about by colonial modernism. Between 1891 and 1921, West Bengal's population was about 94 per cent rural[2]and its performance culture was not in any obvious danger of extinction. Folk culture revolves around tradition and modernity, maintaining an unchanged and conservative reality, while also allowing for fluidity in the invention and recreation of folk art.

It is not purpose of this treatise to establish when modernity arrived and what it brought with it, in the context of West Bengal or India. What matters here, is the practical aspect of Westernization, even though it was not in discursive opposition to tradition. Tradition will be discussed not in terms of performance culture, which has been ever evolving, but in regard to specific social values that play a crucial role in the survival and popularity of jatra. Westernization, on the one hand, brought new forms, techniques, ideas and tastes that permeated the existing performance culture (both as imposition and inspiration)

and on the other, it stimulated a re-evaluation of the self, popularly known as the Bengal Renaissance.

By the mid-twentieth century, jatra had already undergone a transition into what can be referred to as modern jatra (setting aside its theatrical, *svadeśī* and Shakespearean forms) which somehow places the genre within the realm of the popular. The 'concept of popular culture allows a creative dialogue between the modern mass media and genres of folk culture — something [...] very important in the context of a society like India — the emphasis being on their common vernacularism against the heavy weight of classicism and 'high' culture.' (Uberoi2006: 4)

These two classes are related to what is commonly known as *deśī* and *mārgī* – categories that vaguely emerged from the *Nātyaśāstra.* They were then developed in later treatises on music and performance (see Pande1991: 33; Vatsyayan2001: 118-119). *Deśī* labels the folk forms as provincial, and *mārgī*,refers to them as those which followed a (proper) way or became systematized and conventionalized. The *Nātyaśāstra* has been the subject matter of numerous publications, for many reasons. As in other historical narratives, historians of performance often exhibit an inherent drive to trace the earliest possible link or root of a subject matter, thus ending up at the *Nātyaśāstra* as the oldest known compendium on the performing arts. This can occasionally align with efforts to connect Indian performances with the Natyashastra or other early texts, in order to demonstrate India's long unbroken tradition, as a matter of national pride (see Subrahmanyam1997).

> 'the concepts *margi/desi in the Natyasashtra* are not the oppositions, which emerged very recently, in modern writings, when this two terms were selected as the equivalents for respectively English terms "classical" and "folk" art, dance in particular. Criticism of that understanding is already done by few scholars. *Desi* in the *Natyashastra* means "regional" irrespective of the genre, style and contest. "Margi" means

> a rigorously "disciplinized" art, a result of systematization and codification; there are certain rules applied to this art. *Desi* is a broader category, it includes some forms which are denoted as *margi.'*[3]

Indeed, the pursuit of seniority holds considerable civilizational value in colonial and post-colonial discourse. Sanskrit epitomizes antiquity and grandeur and sells well as a sophisticated cultural commodity. Under its self-proclaimed title as the 'fifth Veda' (*Nātyaśāstra*1.14–15), the *Natyashastra* aligns well with early Sanskrit scholarship, with its emphasis on the Vedas while exploring the Indo-European language family.[4] The image of the *Nātyaśāstra* and its perceived significance, as well as the concept of the *mārgī*, stand against the status of comparatively underexposed vernacular art forms, often overshadowed by a recurring focus on those that have been granted authority as national representatives, like Koodiyattam or Bharatanatyam. Such is the predominant focus on the Sanskrit *nāṭaka* in the *Nātyaśāstra* (e.g. 20.10), which has been given an elevated position as compared to lesser forms, which have been only briefly treated. Regional languages and dialects, on the other hand, play a role primarily in the context of their respective dramatic character (e.g. *Nātyaśāstra* 20.10). At the outset of European scholarship on Indian performances, when Sanskrit was the primary focus, Horace Hayman Wilson (1827:viii) stated 'the dramatic pieces which have come down to us, are those of the highest order ... Those of an inferior description, and which existed sometimes apparently in the vernacular dialects, may have been more numerous, and popular, and were more strictly speaking national.' This trend persisted. Ancient travelling theatre and popular art in India, and even globally, have been less prioritized in folklore literature and their sociological dimensions have not been discussed much in academic discourse. 'Intellectual interest in folk theatre started in the late fifties and early sixties in India. The studies [...] were basically descriptive, documenting aspects of stagecraft in the different regions and comparing

them in a general way.' (Hansen 1983: 77). In 1990, Farley P. Richmond, Darius L. Swann and Phillip B. Zarrilli (1990: 239) had found that popular forms 'until recent decades ... were largely ignored by serious scholars, who turned their attention to the Sanskrit drama and theatre. The importance of these other forms as bearers of the Indian theatre tradition was obscured. Seen as crude, degraded, and vulgar, neither the sources of their vitality nor their links to the classical tradition was [sic] sought.' With the outgoing seventies at least, traditional folk performances could mature through more in-depth socio-anthropological works by Carol Farber (1978), Anuradha Kapur (1990), Kathryn Hansen (1993), Sharmila Rege (2000), Simon Charsley / Laxmi Narayan (2006) and Roma Chaterjee (2009) for example.

Popular folk culture 'against the heavy weight of classicism and "high" culture' as Patricia Uberoi (2006: 4) writes in her introduction, largely exists in view of the (official) representation of a society. a nation or its people in general — both flourish on their own terms and conditions side by side. The perceived dichotomies of the rural/urban, oral/written, Great/Little, traditional/modern, sacred/profane and folk/classical have always operated and existed interactively within a continuum. Popular art 'may imply the everyday, unremarkable, and ordinary; or it may refer to dramatic eruptions against the established, normative order. I may indicate the culture of "the people," in the sense of folk culture; or it may refer exclusively to products of the modern mass media in industrialized, capitalist societies, emphasizing their wide popularity, circulation, and saturation; or it may refer to something in-between — a non-elite subculture.' (Uberoi2006: 4) While some art forms might align with one or a few of these aspects of popular culture, it will become evident from the following chapters that modern jatra can typify all of them.

Being situated in the modern or postmodern age, jatra faces the common concerns shared by folklorists, and more prominently, the tendencies of anti-modern Marxist

sociology, regarding the emergence of modern mass media and a consumer culture threatening of its autonomy. Roma Chatterjee (2003: 589), as an example, repeats the common perception that '[e]lectronic transmission frees the form from its original location in specific performative contexts and allows it to become part of the "taken-for-granted," unreflective reality that constitutes the major part of our life-world.' Interestingly, Bengali jatra is not telecasted in West-Bengal, for reasons which will be discussed later (see p. ...). But be that as it may, Odia jatra has a significant TV and internet viewership and even though the jatra is physically dislocated from its 'specific performative context,' viewers have actively engaged with original jatra performances, which serve as mental substratum or background, thus anchoring their digitized participation. A common misconception along similar lines is the assumption that '[f]olk culture is embedded in a social context and in continuous practice, while mass culture is deracinated, from the audience it is supposed to cater to.' (Chatterji2003: 573). In this context, *The Oxford India Companion to Sociology and Social Anthropology* serves as an illustrative example of common generalizations, which may, consciously or unconsciously, exhibit a tendency to criticize mass media. Paraphrasing Sumantra Banerjee (1989) against popular art, Roma Chatterjee claims, the 'valorization of the individual artists goes hand in hand with the atomization of the audience into solitary consumers who passively receive the art form without having to engage with it interactively.' (Chatterjee2003: 589) 'Interactively' must be used on terms of the lowest common denominator to stand its ground. Otherwise, it seems that, for the sake of an ideological argument, a whole world of alternative consumer culture, from group TV sessions to fan clubs, cults or dedicated journals, is glossed over. Popular culture is rather unconcerned about its medium as long as it embodies a set of characteristics that will be discussed in chapter [..and..]. On popular western drama, but aptly analogous to jatra, David Bradby (1980: 167) summarizes

that '[f]ar from offering nothing but escapism, the theatre of the period was able to speak to a popular audience about the things that affected it in ways that seems urgent and relevant. Moreover, this theatre was sufficiently flexible to allow for the inclusion of all forms of popular entertainment ... The strength of many of these theatre forms, especially of melodrama, lay in their ability to elaborate a complex system of visual signs, thus creating a theatre language that was more than the mere words of the texts.'

Structure of the Book

This project consists of five chapters, which have been briefly outlined below. While the book has resulted from an ambitious endeavour to document popular culture with a very long historical trajectory, I have emphasized the evolving structure of live theatre at all critical historical points.

Chapter 1: *Introduction* – In the introductory chapter, I have attempted to define Jatra, a popular folk theater, with a brief background to Jatras in different regions of Eastern India. The next section is a discussion of the larger academic discourse on popular folk performances from a multidisciplinary perspective, in order to contextualize the surviving folk traditions in contemporary Bengal. The emerging arguments then situate the research objectives, methodology and chapter outline.

Chapter 2: *Evolution of Jatra in Precolonial Bengal* is a largely historical chapter based on secondary literature, largely adopting the orientalist approach of reading the history of the performing arts. This chapter traces the origin of jatra from Vaishnavaism in Bengal from the 12th century till the 16th century. In this chapter, I aim to explore the origin and evolution of Jatra performance in precolonial Bengal. The tangible history of Bangali Jatra coincides roughly with the origin of Krishna Jatra in the 16th century, from where it undergoes considerable changes until the emergence of

modern theatrical Jatra in early 1900s in colonial Bengal. To understand the continuity of this robust performing art form in the twenty first century, this chapter aims to outline the linear genealogical development of the indigenous form. The chapter is divided into two main sections and several subsections. The first section covers the evolution of Jatra in precolonial India, exploring its rather obscure history connected to (1) fifth century Sanskrit dramas, (2) ninth century Charyapadas and (3) twelfth century Gitagovinda of Jayadeva. In this earliest and more substantial trace of Jatra's history, Krishna Jatra and the sixteenth-century Bhakti movement hold special prominence. The third chapter continues the chronological progression from the previous chapter titled 'Jatra in Colonial Bengal.' During the Europeanization of Bengal/Indian culture, Bengali Jatra served as a tool for experimentation, modernization, hybridization and more importantly, nationalism. The following section focuses on the colonial era of Jatra, when it underwent a significant transformation, from musical to theatrical Jatra, in response to the emergence of modern Bengali drama in late eighteenth to nineteenth-century Calcutta. This marks the transition from folk to popular, blending the modern proscenium theatre of the West with the folk songs and plays of the East, with modernity, urbanization, industrialization and the cultural renaissance at the helm. This also resulted in the degeneration of Jatras by the elite babu class, westernized middle-class Bengalis. The distinction of the second world outside the official high class cultural collapsed due to the desire to establish a culture with an independent regional and national character, resulting in the emergence of Swadeshi Jatra. After all Jatra was more desi than proscenium theatre. The politicization of Jatra in the twentieth century did not however prevent the Jatrawalas of Calcutta from continuing to institutionalize and commercialize Jatra in the second half of the 20th century.

Chapter 4: *Politics and Commerce: Jatra in Post-Independence Period* presents the evolution of post-independence jatra from

postcolonial jatra. Bengali intellectuals and artists, following the Indian renaissance, continued to embrace the ethos of nationalism in the post-independence period. This led to the commercialization and politicization of popular Jatra. The swadeshi jatras, as part of the independence movement, produced political plays and also also proscenium jatras by people like producer and director like Utpal Dutt of Calcutta. The popularity of Jatra in rural Bengal increased in the post-independence era, as a result of the growing interest the among elite audience in its revival and patronage. Under these circumstances, the leading political party, particularly the Communists, seized it as a tool for political movement, thus adding another dimension to Jatra and its journey of continuity and change.

Similar changes are seen in Jatra's structure and representation.

The first section of the chapter has reviewed the emergence of post-colonial drama/political Jatra in the 1960s and 1970s, Utpal Dutt's revolutionary Jatras, and experimental Shakespearean Jatras in rural Bengal. Rupika Chakravarty (missing ref) writes that under 'the leadership of many talented artists such as Utpal Dutt, Jatra adapted to the newfound obsession with the proscenium theater. Dutt brought the stories of Shakespeare to the paddy fields of rural Bengal, and in doing so adapted the dying tradition of Jatra to its new surroundings.' Dutt disassociated from IPTA's 'semi-bourgeois standard' (Banerjee:2012:222) and its inability to produce revolutionary theatre. He strongly believed that the political theatre should not simply follow its Western counterpart. Instead, he believed that the indigenous model of Girishchandra Ghosh's would prove helpful in creating revolutionary theatre. Dutt, a radical communist ideologue, produced plays like 'Ajeya Vietnam,' 'Ferari Fauj' and 'Kallol,' characterized by intense dramatic features. His critique of the Congress government through his plays led to his imprisonment in 1965. The political potential of Jatra had already been successfully

explored by Mukund Das during the disobedience and anti-partition movement. Dutt however found the form didactic and soon politicized Jatra to reach a wider audience. The post-independence era put Jatra into a different scenario with the rising popularity of new electronic mass media: television, cinema and radio. The question is to what extent did these threaten stage performances or did they instead, lead to the rise of yet another hybrid form. Furthermore, how threatened was the Jatra business by the legitimate/amateur theatre or group theatre that continued to have an expanding audience in Calcutta? To answer these questions, I will map the changes in the material and aesthetic aspects of commercial Jatra groups based in Kolkata from 1950 onward. This will demonstrate that Jatra never lost its appeal to audiences, and ultimately, itinerant Jatra companies managed to reach places beyond the reach of TV, cinema or the city's legitimate theatre.

The succeeding sections present the commercialization and the state patronage in contemporary times. North-Kolkata's Chitpore is home to more than sixty groups that have incorporated new elements from mass media, flourishing by the support and efforts of a handful of business people from Calcutta who even maintain branch offices in places like Asansol, Siliguri and Darjeeling in Bengal. The preferred destinations were 'coal mine areas of West Bengal and Eastern Bihar, the tea garden areas of North Bengal and the railway establishment in lower Assam [which] are the areas with the maximum profit potential for the Jatra troupes.' (Sarkar 1995:123). The changing political economy of Jatra, including in patronage, pricing, structure, gender roles, production methods, schedule of traveling, professionalization of actors, and the institutionalization of Jatra companies in Kolkata, will be discussed. This chapter is largely based on empirical findings carried out towards the end of the last decade, presenting an overall view of recent jatras still in production with both public and private patronage.

In this chapter, I will focus on the changes in both the context and the text of Bengali Jatra over the last two decades. It has undergone major transformations, pushing all limits. These transformations include the introduction of Bollywood actors like Ravina Tondon, Shakti Kapoor on the one hand and on the other, developing stories like London Bombings, 9/11 or The Imprisoned Hero Saddam in an attempt 'to touch a chord with audiences on such sensitive incidents by taking a stand,' as stated by well known Jatra director Haradhan Roy (Biswas 2005). The differences in the theatrical experience in Calcutta and the village during fieldwork will also be analyzed to underline the deep engagement of performance and audience.

The establishment of state patronage, such as the Paschimbanga Jatra Academy, aims to preserve the century-old folk theatre that reaches thousands of people for almost 200 nights per year all over Bengal and its neighbouring regions. Jatra is acknowledged as part of Bengali culture and has currency in cultural politics. This is strongly reflected in stories that portray Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee as a successful leader, who patronizes the Jatra industry. Productions such as *Banglar Masnade Mamata*, *MahasngrameJoyeeMamata*and *EbarMamata* have already made a strong entry in Bengali Jatra 'characterised by overtones and hyperbole' (TOI 2011). The chapter focunses on on an ethnography of a month-long Jatra festival and the promotional activities of the Paschimbanga Jatra Academy.

Chapter 5: *Epilogue* – This concluding chapter reinterates the major changes in Bengali Jatra since its emergence. Bengali Jatra of the early 19th century had tremendous impact on other Jatra theatre traditions in Assam, Tripura and Odisha, even though their cultural practices evolved within their own regional histories. The Jatra forms in all these regions were heavily drawn from Bengali Jatras, during visits on Dussera and other religious occasions hosted by Bengali officers and zamindars.This chapter emphasizes the distinction between Odia and Bengali Jatra, as both share

many commonalities but also have distinctive characteristics in terms of origin, evolution and growth, within changing social structures and social identities. My previous study on Odia Jatra reveals the social world of an entertainment form that has entertained millions of Odias for many centuries and may have been the dominant culture industry. This popular theatre can be understood as a social microcosm of the society it portrays live on the stage.

Jatra expresses certain aspirations for a distinct Odia (or Bengali) version of the modern and desirable: a constant contradiction between tradition and modernity, old and new morality, while still adhering to the old dichotomy of East and West. This mechanism is often reflected in Bollywood cinema, where 'Bollywood is a metaphor of what many have seen as a peculiar Indian historical capacity: it serves as an antechamber or conduit, where the foreign and the modern are received, entertained, and made Indian.' (Khilnani 2002)

Notes

1. "Volkslieder" (1778-1779), as well as his essays on language, culture, and aesthetics.
2. Bose 1993: 24. According to the 2011 Censure Report (www.census2011.co.in/census/state/west+bengal.html) 68.13% of West Bengal is habited in rural areas.
3. Author is not known.
4. The Vedas have even been speculated to substantiate early dramatic culture in India (see for example Guha-Thakurta 1930: 1-3; Pande 1991 3-5; Tarlekar 1999: 4-5; Vatsyayan 2001: 13-15).

CHAPTER 2

Evolution of Jatra in Precolonial Bengal

The focus of the chapter is to examine and review the Jatra performance tradition by exploring its history of origin, decline and revival in precolonial Bengal. The evolution of Bengali jatra into its contemporary form does not follow a linear descent. In the course of history—and this is emphasized by all researchers—there has never been one jatra, but different forms presumed to be steps in its development or predecessors. Kapila Vatsyayan (1980:142) writes that '[a]t no point, from the Caitanya days to the 20th century, does it seem to have a static quality which was being passed on from generation to generation only with minimal changes and modifications as is characteristic of a few forms in other parts of India.' The earliest known Jatra texts, or jātrā pālā in Bengali, date from the nineteenth century, including the following four plays from the collection of Dr Devajit Bandyopadhyay. These text were digitized in 2009 by Professor Sukanta Chaudhuri (Jadavpur University) through the British Library Endangered Archives Programme: Ballālī khāt nāṭak (1867-1868), Ratnābalī (1865-1866)1, Akrūrsambād- gītābhinaẏ (April 1873-May 1873) and the Meghnād badh: lakshmaṇer śaktiśel o pramīlār citārohaṇ nāṭak (1880-1881). Pabitra Sarkar (1995:117) who seems to be deeply connected to the subject, states, '[t]he earliest known Jatra plays ... that have come down to us dated only from the late eighteenth century.' Nevertheless, it is regrettable that a proper chronology of such early specimens, mostly

unidentified in private collections, is still outstanding. In the current state of research, no written documentation or other material has surfaced that might provide a clear picture of the actual performance character of any Jatra prior to the nineteenth century. Whatever precedes historically, relies on speculation, (ambiguous) philological interpretation, or deduction from the present state of affairs. Among these three methods,, the last might be considered the most suggestive. Eventually, precolonial Jatra has to remain a generic term thought to be fed from various performance forms but at best only held together by basic and broad characteristics.

Throughout the literature on the subject, there is a general agreement that jatra has emerged in conjunction with 'religious festivities and ceremonies' (De 1962:402), which seems compatible with the etymology of the term (see page 07). As a general religious performance, Jatra has been chosen as the point of origin or rather departure in *The Bengali Drama*, originally published in 1930 and important since it harks back to nearly all prior discussions of the subject. For Prabhucharan Guha-Thakurta, Jatra seemed to be a performance that operated with the simplest means, representing an uncodified and thus presumed early form of drama. Although Jatra has been conjectured, speculation about the Vedic age pertains more to the general origin of performance and is not a concern here. The subsequent examination of the Krishna-centred Jatra, however, is one of the central debates, not only in early history but with prevalence up to the nineteenth century.

The Vaishnava Origin Theory of Jatra up to the Twelfth Century

Anyone attempting to inquire into the ancient history of Jatra would be best guided by Guha-Thakurta's (1930:1-30) first chapter, "The Relation of the Yātrā to the Ancient Indian Drama," which provides a comprehensive survey of

the entire Indological literature and history of scholarship until approximately 1930. After about ninety years, it is time to attempt another more structured and chronological approach to the subject matter and document on Jatra. The primary purpose is to demonstrate how certain assumptions about Jatra have been passed on from one scholar to another, creating a perception that can be seen even in contemporary scholarship. This section does not seek to re-affirm speculations that have already gained too much currency due to repetition, but, rather, to challenge them, as much of this scholarship still rests on shaky footing. This pertains primarily to the *Vaishnava origin of Jatra theory,* which is preferred and upheld by the majority of scholars. Such theories are directly or indirectly connected to Jatra, which in turn, is always embedded or subsumed within broader discourses on Indian drama. While most of these discourses are interconnected, the following three sub-sections will examine three other overshadowed branches—Shaiva, Shakti and folk origins—separately.[2]

Horace Hayman Wilson (1827a:viii-ix) might have been the first European scholar to mention Jatra, albeit briefly, since it is not the focus of his research. Importantly, he characterized Jatra as being 'generally the exhibition of some of the incidents in the youthful life of Krishna.' (Wilson 1827a:viii), without, however, providing any supporting evidence. A more general context of the performance culture in India at that time, is Wilson's (1827a:ix) conjecture or impression, that '[a]ll the modern compositions ... of a mythological and sectarian character ... intended to celebrate the power of *Krishna* or *Siva.* In publications engaging more critically with the theory of origin, arguments largely revolve around Vishnu and Shiva, with folk culture being placed third.'

The emphasis on Krishna is continued by Christian Lassen (1852:504-505) who appears to be the initiator of the Vaishnava origin of drama theory, which has been referred to by several colleagues in subsequent years, though Jatras, in specifically, are not mentioned.

Lassen (1852:504) assumed that the birth of what he calls dramatic poetry happened among the Vaishnavas, who, to him, were rich in poetry and surpassed the Shaivas. He boldly claimed that the oldest subject matter of Indian drama stemmed from Vaishnava mythology. He invoked a passage from Kālidāsa's *Vikramorvaśī*, where the *gandharva* heroine Urvaśī acts in the play *Lakṣmīsvayaṁvara,* staged by Bharata (refer to Wilson 1826/1827b:46-48; Velankar 1981:L; Konow 1920:64). The logic behind this argument is rather incomprehensible, as Kālidāsa's play, which takes precedence one would assume, has no particular Vaishnava affiliation, and the stage, in addition to it, is opened by the manager with a praise to Shiva. The immediate argument is that *saṅgīta*, or a performance composite of music, dance and song, originated from Krishna and the gopis. A footnote referring to his own writing, in order to clarify the matter, is unfortunately difficult to access and is in Latin (see Lassen 1836)[3]. More specifically, Lassen (1852:504) discusses the *Gītagovinda*, in which he sees an example of the oldest Indian drama. He speculated that plays of earlier date, echoing the content of the *Gītagovinda,* must have been in circulation albeit without the artificial language. Instead of Jatra, which is not mentioned in his work, Lassen (1852:504-505; 1861:816) assumes the *Gītagovinda* to be the material for *rāsa* performances. It must have been Wilson's (1980:92-94) account of his contemporary *"RásYátra"*, three decades earlier, that appears in Lassen footnote (1861:816). This might have also prompted him to project such practises in the ancient past as well. That the Gītagovinda is recited at such occasions, is not mentioned and is probably his own addition. There are smaller arguments in favor of the Vaishnava origin theory scattered throughout his multi-volume corpus, which require a more thorough examination. Many of them might have a rather passive and debatable effect, such as the recitation or singing of the Ramayana by Rama's twin sons Kusha and Lava. Their names in composite mean bard, herald or actor, as if the hero, Lassen (1847:483) writes, had

fathered a lineage of singers through his deeds. Rama[4] is generally thought of as a Vaishnava hero since he has been portrayed as one of Vishnu's ten incarnations.

Thirteen years later, Julius Leopold Klein (1865:97) addresses jatra in his multi-volume Geschichte des Drama's repeating Wilson's (1827a:viii) brief characterization wherein the theme of Jatras are based on incidents in the youthful life of Krishna. Following the usual text-centred approach of Indology, Klein (1866:51) pairs off the Gītagovinda, termed lyrical drama, as well as Rupa Goswami's Lalita-Madhava (1529) with Jatras, described as mixed song and drama and acted in proper costumes[5]. Specific evidence is absent. These two are lumped together with the above mentioned Lakṣmīsvayaṁvara for unexplained reasons. While Lassen (1852:504) used the play as evidence for his Vaishnava origin of Jatra theory, it has now become a Jatra itself. There are further remarks on the Gītagovinda as well, both referring to Lassen (1852:504-505; 1861:816). Klein (1966:46, 50) writes that its archetype is to be found in pre-dramatic times and that it used to be performed during spring celebrations in the form of rāsa celebrations with dance and songs in honour of Krishna. If the reader simply focusses on interest-relevant passages, such as Jatra, it is not always clear how a certain argument or thesis is underpinned. The fragments are often scattered all over the treatise and not seldom construed in a roundabout way or with subtle effect. In this spirit, Klein (1866:45-46) picks up Lassen's (1866:580 / 1847:483) kuśīlava argument and adds that the earliest mentioning of mimic performances is to be found in the Rāmāyaṇa (in most translations book I, canto 13), where inviting actors is part of the arrangement for a royal sacrifice. To make the arguments work, it has to be brought to mind again, that Rāma is part of the Vaishnava band.

In 1882, Nisikanta Chattopadhyaya (1974) decided to firmly establish the Vaishnava theory of origin and shed more light on the academically little known Jatras of Bengal.[6] His doctoral thesis, submitted at the University of Zurich,

is the first exclusively dedicated account to the subject. In the initial historical background check, Chattopadhyaya (1974:131) references Wilson (1827a/b), Klein (1865; 1966) and Lassen (1852; 1861), whose authorities he draws upon intermittently, to corroborate his thesis. For his terminological definition of Jatra, Chattopadhyaya (1974:132) selected three Kṛṣṇa-related seasonal *yātrā* processions (Dola-yatra, in Spring; Janmashtami-yatra, during the rainy season and Rasa-yatra, in Autumn) claimed to be the original occasions, from which its root have been derived. Thereafter, Jatra became gradually popular at various occasions throughout the year, leading to the evolution of more complex forms. Some of these forms are: '*Svapna-vilasa-yatra* (The Dream-joys of *Yashoda*, and *Radha* about *Krishna*), *Divyon-mada-yatra* (The Devine Madness or Ecstasy of *Radha*), *Vicitravilasa yatra* (The Wonderful Joys of *Radha* and *Krishna*), *Ramavanavasa-yatra* (The Exile of *Rama*), *Sitavanavasa-yatra* (The Exile of *Sita*), *Sitaharana-yatra* (The Stealing of *Sita*), *Ravanavadha-yatra* (The Killing of *Ravana*), *Kurukshetra-yatra* (The War of *Kurukshetra*).' (Chattopadhyaya 1974:132). Except for the last mentioned, all can be considered Vaishnavite, while only the first three are related to Krishna. We can add, in this list, The *Gītagovinda*, characterized as 'nothing but a sort of a *Yatra* in Sanskrit' (1974:133) or 'lyrical drama' (1974:137—Lassen 1861:816; 1974:176 - after Klein 1866:51). To support his Vaishnava theory Chattopadhyaya (1974:177) quotes Lassen's (1852:504-505) hypothesis, as paraphrased above, and other findings. These findings are intended more to demonstrate the early popularity of Krishna than to be conclusively related to jatra.

One of the more prominent arguments is made by Albrecht Weber (1873:353-355, 487-491) who had brought to attention historically early details on dramatic performance from Patañjali's *Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣya* (2nd century BCE). This pertains to the general origin of drama. His PhD thesis was originally published in English by Trubner & Co. London, in 1882. The German version was published

a year later, along other essays from Zürich by Rudolphie & Klemm. The version referred to here is a reprint of the 1882 publication. The text passages, that mention (1,4.29; thought of as reciters) and *śobhikas* (3,1.26.6; interpreted as actors) are a bit too complex for an accurate summary.[7] Put simply, the matter pertains to the mentioning of the episode where Kṛṣṇa kills Kaṅsa, which Weber's (1873) translation pictures in light of its performance or effective enactment. This prompts him (1873:490-491) to reinforce Lassen`s (1852) Vaishnava theory of origin, by drawing parallels with religious festivities or the Mystery Plays of the European Middle Ages, which are consistently treated synonymous with the jatras.[8] The *Mahābhāṣya* finding is also mentioned by Auguste Barth (1879:100), who is cited by Chattopadhyaya (1974:179) along Weber (1873) to strengthen the argument. In fact, the *Mahābhāṣya* passage would be a cornerstone of the discourse around the origin of Indian drama for at least the next sixty years. It will reappear in most of the literature reviewed for this survey. The binding of Bali (*balibandham*; 3,1.26.6) as well as the killing of Kaṅsa, both seem to have received subordinated importance in the shadow of Kṛṣṇa, but also in light of Weber's (1873:491) argument that Rāma is ultimately an avatar of Viṣṇu.

The speculations by Klein (1866:51), Lassen (1852:504-505) and what Weber (1873) had extrapolate from his translation, Chattopadhyaya (1974:179) is convinced, 'prove conclusively that festivals in honour of *Krishna*, accompanied by dances and songs (which go as far back as the Vedic period), were frequently celebrated in the third century before Christ, and that the spectacles exhibited during these occasions were in all probability of the nature of the *Yatras*.' As a basic development Chattopadhyaya (1974:158) outlines "[t]hat the Indian drama ... had its origin in cult, [and] that is has passed through three distinct stages, of which the first was that of the *Granthikas* or the *Kathakas*, the second that of the *Yatras*, and the third that of the *Natakas* or veritable dramas.' Chattopadhyaya (1974:158) extends his train of thought

further into the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries, into the 'Age of *Chaitanya* and his followers'—as he dubs it—and might be a pioneer in this connection. The Chaitanya literature will be discussed under another sub-heading (p. 32). The actual substance on which Chattopadhyaya's thesis rests, apart from the Indological sources already discussed, are three Jatras written by the Vaishnava Krishnakamala Gosvami from Dhaka. This however leads right into the nineteenth century thus belonging to a chapter chronologically further ahead.

Shortly after Chattopadhyaya (1882), Leopold von Schroeder (1887:577-590, 592-593) dedicated a lecture to the *Gītagovinda,* roughly summarizing what had been previously published on Jatra. Wilson (1827:viii-ix) re-appears briefly, but at the centre is Lassen's (1852:504-505; 1861:816) Vaishnava theory and his views on the *Gītagovinda,* categorized as lyrical-dramatical poetry and assumed to be recited during *rasa* festivities. Further repeated by von Schroeder's (1887:578, 591) and in support of the Vaishnava theory, is Bharata's play, *Lakṣmīsvayaṁvara* (brought up by Lassen 1852:504 and then Klein 1866:51), as well as Weber's (1873:490-491) discovery in the *Mahābhāṣya,* introduced by Chattopadhyaya (1974:179) into the Jatra discourse. In drawing his ideas from multiple sources, von Schroeder (1887:579-580) creates a pastiche of different accounts that would have been in need of coherent blending. At the end of his arguments for the Vaishnava theory stands a kind of religious festival compared to the Mystery Plays, but not Jatra, even though this comparison is central to Chattopadhyaya's (1974) work. The Jatras, in the following paragraph, are two times separately characterized as depicting episodes from the life of Krishna, once after Wilson (1827) and then after Chattopadhyaya (1974). Despite the earlier argument for the *rasa* festivities, von Schroeder (1887:580) also, referring to Chattopadhyaya (1974:133), holds that the *Gītagovinda* is nothing but a refined jatra. Apart from that, Chattopadhyaya's work provides further support with many details adopted unquestioned as they stand.

This trend continues. Soon after, Sylvain Lévi (1890) published a comprehensive work on Indian drama that also addressed Jatras but remained vague regarded its sources. With much pathos Lévi (1890:316, 394) declared Krishnaism—as commonly used in nineteenth century academia—as the driving force behind the birth of drama, which found its height and second coming through the Caitanya movement. Locating Krishna at the centre of early drama is not a result of a focused survey but an impression that grows in the context of early Sanskrit texts mentioning the Vaishnava avatar in connection with performance and acting. Among these sources are the *Mahābhāṣya* (Lévi 1890:314-315) mentioned by previous authors and two episodes from the *Harivamsha* (roughly 100 BCE - 300/1050 CE - Bryant 2007:97) probably referred to for the first time. The first episode goes into detail about the Yadava's revelry in the ocean with singing and dance, while the second one narrates how Krishna's clique and a famous actor infiltrate an enemy city disguised as a theatre troupe, actually performing the *Ramayana* among others (Lévi 1890: 326-329; see Dutt 1897:634-648, 654-666). None of this, of course, is conclusively related to Jatra, but is used to support the Vaishnava origin of the Jatra theory. The *Caitanya Candrodaya* (1573), mentioned as an example of the new spirit in drama, is in Sanskrit as well and with content and form that appear unsuited for Jatra[9]. Still, this forms the brief preamble for Lévi's Jatra paragraph which seems, even though not accounted for, to be taken to the greater extent from Chattopadhyaya (1882).[10] The *Gītagovinda*, which might be also mentioned, is classified by Lévi (1890: 235) as quasi dramatic and halfway between hymn and drama, but it is not embedded into the Jatra discourse.

A decade later, Arthur Anthony Macdonell (1900) composed a chapter on Indian drama using an unfortunate practice of not providing proper acknowledgement of sources. From the perspective of the development of drama, Macdonell (1900:347) argued that the 'primitive stage is

represented by the Bengal *yātrās* and the *Gītagovinda*. These form the transition to the fully-developed Sanskrit play in which lyrics and dialogue are blended.' This was followed by common arguments to construct the Vaishnava theory of origin, emphasizing the importance of Krishna through the *Mahābhāṣya* passage, the *Lakṣmīsvayaṁvara* (Kālidāsa's play wihin a play), the *Gītagovinda* and the observation that 'modern *yātrās* generally represent scenes from the life of that deity.' It has correctly been called 'modern' here, an observation that is somewhat blurred in Chattopadhyaya's (1882) work which had built the Vaishnava theory of origin substantially on contemporary jatra plays (see p. ...). The direct or indirect reference to Chattopadhyaya (1882) is quite likely, given Macdonell's (1900:347) comparison with the Christian mystery plays and a frequently reappearing conclusion that jatras are 'a kind of religious plays, in which scenes from the legend of the god were enacted mainly with the aid of song and dance, supplemented with prose dialogue improvised by the performers.' Macdonell's (1900:347) general conclusion is that '[f]rom all this it seems likely that the Indian drama was developed in connection with the cult of Vishṇu-Kṛishṇa.'

A few years later, Hermann Oldenberg (1903:236-) includes a chapter on drama in his treatise of ancient Indian literature. This chapter is not based on any novel research of his own, but is abundant with personal comments and assessment. He feels indebted to Sylvain Lévi (1890) and J. L. Klein (1865), both of whom he credits in the first footnote of the chapter.

When it comes to outlining the birth of drama, Vishnu-Krishna and Shiva initially seem to get equal share in his narrative. Even though it seems that he is not decidedly intent on promoting the Vaishnava theory, his assortment of imported arguments leave little room for alternative interpretations. Once again, the *Mahābhāṣya* is mentioned by Oldenberg (1903:238-240) along with *Lévi's (1890: 326-*

329) Harivaṃśa episodes and the *Rasa* festivities which Klein (1966:50) had taken from Lassen (1852:504-505; 1861:816).

As is customary, Jatras are characterised as folkloric religious performances that primarily depitc events from the life of Krishna. For more details, Oldenberg (1903:239) indirectly refers to Chattopadhyaya's (1882) work in a footnote, where the *Gītagovinda* is once again portrayed as being closely associated with Jatras.

In the same year, actor, director, and scholar Karl Mantzius (1903:60-93) researched the subject well and devoted thirty-three pages of his 'universal history' of theatre to the Indian sub-continent. Since he had not done any original research, however, his paragraph on Jatra can only assumed to be based on previous writings, which he references without indicating their sources. A glance at the bibliography and citations in different contexts, suggest that he borrowed from from the works of at least von Schroeder (1887), Sylvain Lévi (1890) and Klein (1865). About Jatra, Mantzius (1903:63-64) notes that they survived up to the present day in Bengal and that '[t]hese popular dramas generally represent events in the life of Krishna.' Furthermore, the *Gītagovinda* is described as 'customary' a 'lyric-dramatic poem' and given as an example of such plays. As cited later by Guha-Thakurta (1930:4), Mantzius (1903:64) concludes or rather re-narrates that '[i]t seems natural to suppose that these popular religious plays mark an earlier stage of development in the Indian drama than the traditional art poems of the middle ages, and to draw the conclusion that ancient scenic art was closely connected with the worship of Vishnu.' He concedes however that cogent evidence to prove the above, is yet to be provided.

In the following year, Johannes Hertel (1904) briefly touches upon the jatras, but only in passing. His subject matter is situated in a complex academic dispute surrounding the dialogic *Rigveda* verses, the *saṁvāda*, which is presumed by many scholars to be the earliest form of Indian drama. On the margins of that debate, Hertel (1904:141) believes that

Jatras may serve the link between these *Rigveda* verses and the later Sanskrit drama.[11] While the drama continued to evolve, Hertel (1904:167) writes, the jatras remained faithful to its ancient type. At the same it, it also got elevated to an art, as seen with the *Gītagovinda*. To reinforcing his own *Mahābhāṣya* argument, Hertel (1904:141-142) summarizes that Chattopadhyaya (1882) sees the origin of drama in the Krishna cult. In addition, he quotes that Chattopadhyaya (1882), in alignment with Weber's perspective, sees the first stage of the Indian drama in the performances of the *granthikas* (see page 12) which for Hertel (1904) probably pose as the performers for the dialogic hymns. There is a further reference to Jatra that includes a citation from Chattopadhyaya (1974:167) regarding the compact equipment of the travelling Jatra theatres. However, it is nearly impossible to make a clear connection with the actual discussion on the *saṁvāda*. It is clear that Hertel (1904:150-151) employs all available means, sometimes overlooking facts, to position *Gītagovinda* as a drama to have the highest affinity with the Vedic 'dramas'.

Von Schroeder (1908:69-70) rejects Hertel's (1904:138, 141) theory which positions the Jatras as a link between the dialogic *Rigveda* verses and the later Sanskrit drama. He emphatically holds that both have no connection. The Jatras, being far more primitive than the vedic verses, would have retained their entirely folk-like character, despite many attempts to raise them to a higher literary plane.[12]Notwithstanding, a long passage denying the presumed continuity of Vedic drama, von Schroeder (1908:71) himself ends up in a state of argumentative uncertainty. He construes that whatever the priests had discarded from the ritual, including elements of drama that can be traced back to the rudimentary *saṁvāda* verses, continued in the lower strata of the population as a primitive dramatic form characterized by dance and song.

This would include those gods who were marginalized by the *Vedas*, and *Śiva and Viṣṇu who gained special pop*ularity and also incorporating the apparently historical hero Kṛṣṇa.

This juncture would explain the importance of these gods in the origin of Indian drama. How these folk forms are related to Jatra is unclear, but von Schroeder (1908:69) suggests that both *saṁvāda* and Jatra might have sprung from closely related or similar primitive conditions.[13] While the longer passage discussing the matter conveys the idea that Jatras be understood to a basic extent at least, they were in fact lesser known due to the absence of early textual sources. When addressing jatras in the context of the 'Vishṇu-Krishṇa-Religion' (1908:69), von Schroeder (1908:13-16) reiterates all major arguments from his earlier publications (*Lakṣmīsvayaṁvara*, *Mahābhāṣya, Gītagovinda*) in roughly the same manner, while now also incorporating *Lévi's (1890: 326-329) Harivaṃśa* episodes in his arguments. Regarding the *Gītagovinda*, von Schroeder (1908:15-16) is more affirmative in his stance this time, declaring it to be a jatra elevated to the status of a genuine work of art. The earlier confusion in the essay from 1887 seems now appears ironed out by characterizing the presumed triannual performances cantered around *rāsa* and the *rāsamaṇḍala* as an earlier version of what would later be termed jatra. However, the more intriguing aspect of the essay lies in its counter view to some of Chattopadhyaya's (1882) assumptions and the Vaishnava theory, which will be discussed in greater detail in one of the following sections .

As a side note it should be mentioned that by 1909, the Krishna-Vishnu-cult and its correlation with the origin of drama was established to such an extent that Moriz Winternitz (1909:105) simply needed to mention in passing, that it is known and has been explained earlier (comp. Winternitz 1920, p. 19).

A few years later, Ernest Philip Horrwitz (1912:176-182) dedicated a somewhat peculiar chapter to jatras, notable for its absence of references or citations. As customary by now, Horrwitz (1912:29, 177-179) gives particular prominence to Krishna and related literature while the *Gītagovinda* is only mentioned in passing. Horrwitz (1912:178) then describes

the jatras as '[s]acred operas ... frequently produced in connection with the religious yâtras or processions of the Krishnaists' which later moved to a secular stage. In the following, Horrwitz (1912:29) directly leaps into either the fifteenth or nineteenth century writing about the revival of jatra and not its origin. 'The Krishna cult has been successfully revived in Bengal, and numerous yâtras or melodramas have been composed in honour of the god.' 'The regeneration of Indian theatre [he (1912:178) claims] is mainly through these refined and often original plays.' From thereon at least, it is evident he had either plagiarized Chattopadhyaya (1882) or those following him, when stating that the jatra's present popularity would be owed largely to Krishnakamala Gosvami from Dhaka, mentioned earlier.[14] The Caitanya movement, mentioned only by Chattopadhyaya (1974:158) and Lévi (1890:394), had thus far been of lesser significance in the more Indological research focussed on the birth of drama, but finds another rough mention here. Horrwitz (1912:180-182) also briefly recycles Kavikarṇapūra's Sanskrit play *Caitanya Candrodaya*, which Lévi (1890:394) had used for his jatra paragraph, but seems to be rather unfamiliar with the plot.

Three years later, William Ridgeway (1915:157) states that jatras and the *Gītagovinda* embody the primitive stage of Sanskrit drama, an argument directly borrowed from Macdonell (1900:347) (p. 14). By this time, writers had at least ten authors whose proper citation would often be subject to whim or necessity. With the *Gītagovinda* already mentioned, Ridgeway (1915:157) continues with arguments for the Vaishnava theory of origin and writes, in consonance with Chattopadhyaya (1882) that '*Yatra* originally meant a procession, such as those customary with the worshippers of Krishna in Bengal. But as a sort of lyrical drama was a regular concomitant of such processions, these musical dramas in time were termed *yatras*, and thus continued even after they were no longer rigidly connected with sacred ritual and temple precincts.' Subsequently, Ridgeway

(1915:157; see as well 140) introduces the *Lakṣmīsvayaṁvara,* followed by the *Mahābhāṣya,* and summarizes the alleged arguments with Macdonell (1900:347), as cited on page 14, who concluded that '[f]rom all this ... it seems likely that the Indian drama was developed in connexion with the cult of Vishnu Krishna [sic].'

Sten Konow's (1920) well-organized treatise of the Indian drama unites and summarizes various opinions on early Indian drama and its origin. Jatra, which appears to be of minor importance in the majority of publications on Indian drama, finds brief mention in Konow (1920:38, 39, 43), and that too only in the context of earlier publications already discussed and without any additional comment. Konow (1920:37-38, 44-46, 48) discusses the *Mahābhāṣya* argument in the context of different scholars which need not be reproduced here. One essay cited by Konow (1920:44-45), however, raises a noteworthy matter, which, while not exactly critical for the jatras, concerns the Vaishnava theory of origin:

> In 1916, Heinrich Lüders (1940:406-422) had scrutinized Weber's (1873:487-491) *Mahābhāṣya* translation that had become the foundation of many a theory around the origin of Indian drama and a historical marker as well. According to Lüders (1940:406-422), the earlier translation is erroneous at a critical point and the issue is not about acting but the practice of show men narrating the story in question. This circumstance weakens the Vaishnava theory to a considerable extent, if not entirely. However, it appears that Keith (1924), Guha-Thakurta (1930) and others probably as well, decided to adhere to the old version for their own argumentative conveniences or other convictions. A decisive factor might well be that Lüders' uses the opportunity to transfer the entire debate towards his rather controversial shadow play theory, which does not find agreement with many scholars.

Given the latest discoveries concerning the *Mahābhāṣya*, Moriz Winternitz (1920a) chose to refine Lüders' (1940:406-422) arguments, thereby overlooking the jatras as well. The

first mention (Winternitz 1920a:125, 136-137) is in context of Bhāsa`s *Bālacarita* (ca. 300-500 CE; after Kunbae 1968:2), which is identified as the earliest preserved stage play on the Krishna legend. Asserting that it is a proper drama in five acts, the author, by a simple method of elimination, holds that it is neither a primitive 'Mystery Play' of the Bengali jatra type nor related to its contemporary version.

The second mention is related to Rāmakṛṣṇa's *Gopālakelicaṅdrikā*, which Winternitz (1920a:138-139) places between drama and epic, due to many prose interpolations and verses seemingly unsuitable for acting. This play is proposed to be a jatra type according Willem Caland (1917), who had first published the manuscript. Nothing much can be learned from both statements, but they may someday serve as pieces of a puzzle. It should become evident to the reader once more that jatra research barely exist or, if it does, it is only sub categorical as compared to Sanskrit drama.

Winternitz (1920b) is widely known for his three volume corpus on Indian literature, where jatra has a few appearances as well. But that shall be discussed in the context of upcoming chapters. Relevant for the time period here is what Winternitz (1920b:130) has to say about the *Gītagovinda*. He states that the poem was often classified as a dramatic one and cites Lassen (1852:504), Chattopadhyaya (1974:133), von Schroeder (1887:580) and Lévi (1890: 235) as references. Von Schroeder (1887), he writes, termed it a refined jatra while Chattopadhyaya (1974:133) is merely relegated to the footnote, even though he was the forerunner and source. In an unidentifiable publication cited by Winternitz (1920b:130) Pischel (Schmidt et. al. 1906:209) reasons that the *Gītagovinda* is far removed from the beginnings of drama due to its compact from, which leaves no transitional space for improvization. Yet he calls it a melodrama. Winternitz (1920b:130-131) himself emphasizes that the *Gītagovinda* belongs to the *kāvya* category and is conceptualized as an epic poem by its author. Jayadeva did not attempt to write a dramatic poem or a drama, and the embedded folk-like

songs that form the core of the work can hardly be imagined without music, singing and dancing.

Furthermore, Winternitz (1920b:317) discusses Budhasvāmin's fragmentary *Bṛhatkathā-Ślokasaṁgraha* (*BS*) manuscript, which buoyantly pictures the life of the people in many aspects and, notably, mentions jatras. However, it seems, the author had not examined the text himself and instead summarizes from Felix Lacôte's text (1908b). The jatra passages in the *BS* do not specify the nature of the jatra which leads Lacôte (1908b:234) to envision scenarios such as storytellers and singers at the Nāgavana, based on *BS* 7.57 (Lacôte 1908a:90). Without straying from the topic, it might be annotated, that there are quite a few references to folk performances or performers, that do not explicitly mention the jatras, but are of the sort one would imagine to have an affinity with its, especially with its concept or broad nature.[15]

In 1924, Berriedale Keith (1954) wrote a widely circulated book dealing with the origin of Sanskrit drama, featuring ample references to jatra as well. The first mention is embedded in the debate on the existence of a Vedic ritual drama, a topic very briefly discussed in connection with Hertel (1904, 1909; p. 16) and von Schroeder (1908; p. 16). Keith (1954:16) is of the opinion that '[t]he dramas of the ritual ... are in a sense somewhat out of the main line of the development of the drama; the popular side has survived through the ages in a rough way in the Yātrās well known in the literature of Bengal, while the refined and sacerdotalized Vedic drama passed away without a direct descendent.'[16] His argument is thus in line with Von Schroeder (1908).

Keith (1954:17) summarises Hertel's (1904, 1909) theory as well, which sets a sequence for the development of Indian drama, from the *saṁvāda* hymns over to the *Suparṇādhyāya,* by keeping the jatras as a bridge to classical drama. Von Schroeder's (1908) objections, that come next, have already been discussed.

From there, Keith (1954:17) makes a rather speculative claim, suggesting that '[t]he hymns ...[which] represent the

beginning of a dramatic art ... may be compared with the form of the *Gītagovinda*.' His footnote to this claim, Keith's (1954:272) own reference in another page, offers nothing in support. Similarly, Winternitz (1920b:130), who is also cited, has nothing to say about this comparison and generally holds the opposite opinion regarding the dramatic nature of the *Gītagovinda*. Keith (1954:272) may have been referring to Hertel (1904:150-151; p. 16), who made this rather contentious assumption twenty years earlier.

Keith (1954:40, 272) largely aligns with most previous authors and repeats what is already familiar. In the first account, he writes 'in Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* we have in literary form the expression of the substance of the Yātrā, lyric songs, to which must be added the charms of music and dance.' Under the chapter on "Religion and Drama" that focuses for the greater part on Kṛṣṇa, Keith (1954:40) further emphasizes that the 'great importance in this regard is the persistence in popularity of the Yātrās, which have survived the decadence of the regular Sanskrit drama.' In the second account he maintains that the *Gītagovinda* 'is a poem, and can be enjoyed simply as such, but it is also capable of a quasi-dramatic presentment. It reveals a highly-developed outcome of the simple Yātrās of the Kṛṣṇa religion.' In order to provide a compete account, it can be added that jatras appear once more in reference to Konow (1920:43-44). Keith (1954:51) claims that Konow attempts to construe a secular, amusement-based origin of Indian drama, probably due to many arguments that emphasize the down-to-earth character of ancient (folk) performances, considered as precursors to the drama. Keith writes 'Konow adduces as evidence of the secular origin of the drama the Yātrās, which are essentially bound up with the religion of Kṛṣṇa.' However, it remains up to the reader to find any such attempt by Konow (1920) and it seems more likely that Keith is misreading the passage entirely. As Guha-Thakurta (2000:6) has previously mentioned, Keith (1954:45) is another stern advocate of the

Vaishnava theory of origin of drama, theoretically bearing wider implication for jatra. Besides the many arguments encountered throughout the treatise, the cornerstone of this theory, previously elaborated by Keith (1910, 1911, 1912, 1920), is once again the *Mahābhāṣya* passage chosen by many scholars as the earliest unambiguous textual reference to a dramatic performance, despite Lüders' (1940:406-422) new translation. Keith (1920) had, in fact objected to Lüders (1940) and to this day, it remains unresolved, whether the passage refers to actual acting or not. In this context, it is noteworthy to mention that Guha-Thakurta's (2000:5) footnote attached to Weber's *Mahābhāṣya* translation, refers to *Lüders (1940) and Winternitz (1920a) but instead of the new transla*tion, it mentions only Lüders' shadow play theory, which Lüders himself is rather critical of.

Shortly after, in the year 1927, a treatise on Sanskrit drama in English was published by an Indian scholar who would be succeeded by several authors in the following years. One of the reasons that prompted K. P. Kulkarni (1927:1) to write, was that many of the studies were in French or German and, above all, not available to the students. His study is essentially a survey that navigates through a selection of existing opinions, but it does not give jatra and, more importantly, eastern jatra, a significant place. Kulkarni (1927:13) however introduces some new ideas, stating that the jatras have evolved from the monologue stories of the Kīrtans or Purāṇas, which in turn derived from the epics. 'As the cults of Krishna, Rama and other divine incarnations spread their influence, the monologues were changed to dialogues or polylogues or processions called Yatras or Lilās.' Referring to an unknown publication by a Dr D.Q. Belwalkar, he adds that these 'are wrongly said to have influenced the Sanskrit Drama while reverse is the case.'

in the year 1930, this literature review finally returns to its starting point—Prabhucharan Guha-Thakurta's (2000) study of the origin of Bengali jatra. In light of the different theories and opinions surveyed, Guha-Thakurta (2000) was,

of course, able to crystallize his own ideas and conclusions which, as a whole, go beyond the Vaishnava theory of origin and will be addressed in the following chapters (see p. ...).[17]

While the tone of his study appears critical, especially regarding one-sided or overly far-fetched theories, some older arguments remain in force. Corresponding to Keith's (1924) emphasis on the *Mahābhāṣya* passage based on Weber's (1873) translation, Guha-Thakurta (2000:6-7) acknowledges such performances described therein 'and that the Kṛṣṇa-Kaṅśa [sic] legend was one of the subjects of such performances.' He adds, however, that 'the assumption that one particular legend or the ritual in connection with only one particular Hindu god, being combined with sacred music and recitative dialogues, gave rise to the Indian drama, cannot be accepted as wholly satisfactory.' This idea is reiterated in a concluding remark 'that the theme of a Yātrā was by no means necessarily taken from the life and adventures of Kṛṣṇa' (Guha-Thakurta 2000:14).

The *Gītagovinda*, having played a direct or subtle role in the background, is another pillar of the Vaishnava theory that Guha-Thakurta (2000:10) is critical of. He writes, 'the repeated and persistent mentioning of Jaydeb's *Gīta Govinda*, as if it were a Bengali Yātrā, has led the champions of the Kṛṣṇāite origin of the Yātrā into obvious mistakes. *Gīta Govinda* is not a Bengali drama; it is written in Sanskrit. Although it presents some resemblance with some of the Kṛṣṇa-Yātrās, it can hardly be regarded as a representative of the Bengali Yātrā proper.'

The third Indian treatise on drama in English by R. K. Yajnik (1933) is only seemingly homemade, coming with a heavy Western bias that should not however be of concern at the moment. In introducing Indian theatre, Yajnik (1933:20) moves, in a few sentences, from the *Nātyaśāstra* to Kālidāsa, placing the *Lakṣmīsvayaṁvara* at the opening of his drama history. This drama however appears neither for compelling logical cohesion nor to argue specifically for any sectarian contiguity. Yajnik (1933:54) does not systematically address

the origin of drama, but in discussing a link between popular forms and the mature drama, he devotes a sub-chapter to the jatras. Therein, Kṛṣṇa is declared the undisputed protagonist, not without annotation. 'In love, war, political shrewdness and philosophy he is claimed to be unique. Compared to him, Rāma looks simple, straightforward and less romantic. Śiva is too rigid and secluded, practicing penance on the Himalayas.' Probably in order to avoid repeating tedious speculative debates, Yajnik (1933:54) refers to Guha-Thakurta (1930:4ff), writing '[w]hether the Bengali *yātrās* are a direct continuation of the ancient Vedic drama and whether the opera of *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva in the twelfth century A.D.'

Witz (1912), Hertel (1904, 1909), Ridgeway (1915), Lüders (1916), Winternitz (1920) and Keith (1924) all continue to suggest, that 'in any event, the *yātrās* are like 'sacred operas frequently produced in connection with the religious processions of the Krsnaites.' Guha-Thakurta forms a link directly with the classical drama, which are problems which need not be considered here.' However, Yajnik (4:1933) actually quotes Horrwitz (54:1912), who is referred to therein and who himself had most probably copied from Chattopadhyaya (178). From thereon, it is quite clear that Yajnik (1882:1933) availed himself of Chattopadhyaya's (55) thesis without any reference, which seems to be customary by now. A couple of sentences earlier, evading to take a stand on the *Gītagovinda*, it is now stated that 'in the case of Kṛṣṇa *yātrā*, Jayadeva fixed the mode of presenting the Kṛṣṇa love-romance. ... As the devotional element decreased the amorous element became exaggerated and degraded, till Kṛṣṇakamal Gosvāmin raised the level of *yātrā* in the later part of the nineteenth century.'

In the following year, Hemendra Nath Das Gupta (1934) published another work on *The Indian Stage* which deals with the jatras in a rather comprehensive manner, but places their origin in the Caitanya era, which is the subject of the following chapters. There are however, by now, familiar names and arguments interwoven that shall be mentioned

in the context of this survey. In 'discus[sing] certain views about the origin of drama,' Das Gupta (1934:21, 90-91) rejects Macdonell's (1900) Vaishnava theory of origin which, he reads, is based on the *Lakṣmīsvayaṁvara* and the view that the *Gītagovinda* 'is the earliest literary specimen of the primitive type of play.' Equally rejected is Keith (1924), who embeds his theory of origin as well, in the Kṛṣṇa legend. Das Gupta (1934:21) concedes that the 'Bengali Yatras ... drew some inspiration from the ... 'Gitagovinda,' which formed afterwards the main theme of the jatras .... However, it would not be correct to say that this was the solitary source of development. As to the earliest dramas that proceed the ... 'Gitagovinda' ... which however was not a drama, we get none from the Krishna-Vishnu cult except what we find in Mahabhashya.'

This means that the Vaishnava origin is unsustainable for him, although the *Gītagovinda* provided the 'main theme of the jatras' to come, which Das Gupta (1934:90) repeats in his Caitanya chapter, the prequel to the jatras.[18] Further arguments related to this early segment of history is to be found in the jatra chapter. Das Gupta's (1934:111) reference to the Vedic age and jatras in Horrwitz (1912:178) of all people, further nourishes a suspicion his treatise might be dependent on the availability of material. Hertel's (1904:138, 141) proposition to see in the jatras, a link between the *saṁvāda* verses and the later Sanskrit drama is mentioned to some extent but remains under-explained. Whatever be the case, Das Gupta's (1934:111) remains critical and concludes that '[j]atras and theatres might have a common origin, but Indian drama is the fruit of high Aryan culture ... But when drama declined under antagonistic influence [he continues], the jatra began to come in vogue in the country. There was theatre in ancient times, as there is now, only in the middle ages there was no theatre but Jatras in the country.' There are further quotations from the usual suspects, Wilson (1827a:viii), Horrwitz (1912:178) and Mantzius (1903:64), all three of who are in favour of the Vaishnava theory of origin,

supposed to speak here for the birth of Vaishnava jatra, which Das Gupta (1934:113-114) places in the Caitanya era (see p. 32).

In the year of Independence, a very profound and resourceful history of Sanskrit literature was published in Kolkata by S. N. Dasgupta (1947), also addressing the jatras. The first mention is under the supra-heading of *Kāvya*, dealing at some point with the *Gītagovinda*. The rather extensive body of preceding literature on the matter compels Dasgupta (1947:393, 667) to refer at least some of the known names (Lassen, Lévi, Jones, Pischel and von Schroder) without giving dates or details on the publications, however. For von Schroder it is a given, that the *Gītagovinda* is a 'refined Yātrā'. Dasgupta's (1947:393) own opinion is that '[t]hough cast in a semi-dramatic mould, the spirit is entirely lyrical; though modelled perhaps on the prototype of the popular Kṛṣṇa-yātrā in its musical and melodramatic peculiarities, it is yet far removed from the old Yātrā by its want of improvisation and mimetic qualities.' The last point is somewhere along the lines with Pischel (Schmidt et. al. 1906:209; p. 20) annotated earlier. Explaining the unique style of the *Gītagovinda* outside of 'the tradition of the Sanskrit Kāvya,' Dasgupta (1947:394-395) suggests '[i]t is conceivable that popular festive performances, like the religious Yātrā, with their mythological theme, quasi-dramatic presentation and preference for song and melodrama, must have reacted upon the traditional Sanskrit literature and influenced its spirit and form to such an extent as to produce irregular and apparently nondescript types, which approximated more distinctly to the vernacular tradition, but which, being meant for a more cultivated audience, possessed a highly stylised form.' Further in the text, Dasgupta (1947:510) states again that the *Gītagovinda* is 'enjoyed as a lyrical narrative or song, but ... [is] at the same time capable of ... quasidramatic presentation.' In the poem, one can 'find a sublimated outcome of the operatic and melodramatic Kṛṣṇa-Yātrā,' Further mentions of jatra, excluding those sections that

pertain to the fifteenth century, which will be dealt with in the following chapter, are in connection with the summary of literature under the sub-chapter "Sanskrit Drama." For Hertel, for example, Dasgupta (1947:631) summarises that '[a] prototype of the old type of drama may be traced in the modern 'jātrās' of Bengal.' Due to lack of cogency, however, a Ṛgvedic drama and the jatra comparison, is ruled out by Dasgupta (1947:632), who is in agreement with Keith's (1954:18) objections. That 'Konow thinks ... we have even now the model of the old Indian drama in the *yātrās* and similar performances,' is quoted but not further commented on by Dasgupta (1947:641).

Recapitulating this survey, it should be clear that the *Mahābhāṣya* text passages were only included here due to their argumentative inter-linkage with the jatras (often termed Mystery Plays) that Chattopadhyaya (1974; p. 11) and his predecessors had established. The argument aimed to testify to the existence of dramatic art around the second century BCE, the approximate date of the text. The specific reading was however to see it as evidence for the literary prevalence or superordination of the Vaishnavas. Even though Dasgupta (1947:636-641) does not directly address the issue in question, he does contribute new and more encompassing readings of the *Mahābhāṣya* which are recommended for reading and help to evaluate the actual load-bearing capacity or validity of what has been written so far. Through Dasgupta's (1947:639-640) reading of *Mahābhāṣya* 1,4.29, it becomes clear that a vocal performance on stage with *naṭas* (presumed actors) and *granthikas* (presumed story-tellers) existed. However, the one thing that the *Mahābhāṣya* cannot provide is a clear picture of the dramatic nature of these performances, which are often evaluated in relation to a full-fledged Sanskrit drama. In an earlier passage of his book, Dasgupta (1947:11) mentions the *Mahābhāṣya* as well and, in light of a long list of references in the accompanying footnote (Kielhorn 1906; Weber 1873; Lüders 1916, Lévi 1890; Hillebrandt 1918; Keith 1920, 1924)

calls it 'possibly dramatic' to be on the safer side. Dasgupta (1947:642) of course deals with the origin of drama. His 'own position in the matter is that secular pantomimic dances associated with songs were, in all probability, held mostly on religious occasions and with the growth of religious legends these were associated with plots drawn from those legends.' Refusing to side with either a secular or sacred origin of drama, Dasgupta (1947:642-643) surmises that '[t]he infiltration of legendary plots or symbolic plots must have taken place from very early times; it would be impossible to distinguish therein the religious and the secular motive, both having interpenetrated into each other, into the production of the device of these performances at the time of religious festivities.'

Publications on theatre and performance in the following years partly tell of jatra, but only its twentieth century avatar and will thus be discussed under different sub-chapters. In the year 1995, a remarkable Jatra Special Number was conceptualized for the *Folklore Research Journal* published from Kolkata. It features three essays on jatra, out of which one touches lightly upon the origin of jatra. Asutosh Bhattacharyya (1995:107), does not measure out the different theories about its origin but skips over a couple of common assumptions, including the *Gītagovinda*, which to him 'is entirely the form of a musical drama.' To counter the general belief that Sanskrit works could hardly appeal to the masses, Bhattacharyya (1995:107) holds the opinion 'that it was composed originally in vernacular.' Almost 150 years ago, Lassen (1852:504) had already speculated that plays echoing the content of the *Gītagovinda* must have been in circulation and of earlier date albeit without the artificial language. From thereon, Bhattacharyya's (1995) account runs generally Kṛṣṇa-centred but moves into an era that will be discussed in the following chapters.

The Vaishnava Origin of Jatra Theory from the twelfth to the seventeenth century

It is clear that the conclusion of this chapter needs an explanation, of how the Vaishnava theory could gain ascendency in such a way that the reader cannot even imagine otherwise. Among the at least twenty-three authors cited, there are [...] with alternative narratives or rather parallel streams for the evolution of jatra, such as those from Shaiva, Shakti and folk background. However, these have not had sufficient weight to balance the influence of the Vaishnava theory. Moreover, there is a conditional acceptance of the Vaishnava theory, reinforced through a reverse chronology with Chattopadhyaya's (1882) Krishnakamala Gosvami at the far end in the nineteenth century and the Vaishnava era in Bengali literature in the middle. Through the *Gītagovinda*, central to the discourse since Lassen (1852) or rather Klein (1865), most speculation on the jatra's antiquity has always had a link to roughly the twelfth century at the farthermost end, which also coincides with the birth of the Bengali language. It is quite probable that Caitanya (27.02.1486-29.06.1530; after Zbavitel 1976:171) and his followers were engaged in jatra performances, making the time in between these two centuries, and after of course, the second and probably more momentous period of origin for jatra. Except for a few lines that directly apply to jatra, it is a rather challenging task to find conclusive evidence for its genesis. As a reminder, the earliest known jatra texts, or *jātrā pālā* in Bengali, are from the nineteenth or the late eighteenth century, if one is to believe Pabitra Sarkar (1995:117). Thereofore, a comprehensive survey of literature from Bengal, including what was circulated, up to the sixteenth century, in search of those texts that have a high affinity with what is historically documented or known as jatra. In order to tie in with the previous, this chapter will further on focus on Vaishnava literature, while everything else will be dealt with under subsequent chapters.

Twelfth to Fifteenth Century Vaishanva Literature

The phase of the development of jatra, may have been spearheaded by the famous *Gītagovinda,* mentioned in all treatises on Indian theatre. By now, the reader should be familiar with the dominant view on the nature of the poem and its presumed relationship with the jatras. Majority scholars have agreed with Lassen (1852; p. 09) that the *Gītagovinda* is the refined version of an old form of drama, which many associated with jatra.

However, there have been many scholars, critical of this view. Only Winternitz (1920b:130-131; p. 20) writes clearly that poem is not a drama and was not intended to be one. Commenting on its actual adequacy for staging, Horace Hayman Wilson (1835:393-394), one of the pioneer writers on Indian drama in English, made an interesting assessment when portraying the *Vidagdha Mādhava* (1533), an adaptation of the *Gītagovinda*. Wilson (1835:393) writes that the play 'is, in fact, "Songs of Jayadeva" dramatized. It may easily be supposed, that the jealous squabbles of two lovers furnish insufficient materials for a play of such length, and accordingly the Vidagdha Mádhava has little action, and is made up of dialogue that leads to nothing, and of uninteresting description. An attempt has been made to give some variety to it by the introduction of Chandrávalí, a nymph of Vrindávan, enamoured of Krishna, and by representing the Paurnamásí, the personified day of full moon, as interesting herself in the union of Krishna and Rádhá.' While it is a matter of speculation, whether the *Gitagovinda* or its basic structure had been the substance of earlier drama or jatra, it is clear that it definitely has been adopted for later dramatic literature, as proved by the *Vidagdha Mādhava*. There are further examples that also speak for the regional migration of the poem. Ramavarma K. Raja (1910:638) who briefly described the cakkyars, Winternitz (1920b:162) mentioned, wrote about a '*Kṛṣṇa-nāṭakam* (in Malayalam *Kṛṣṇātam*) [which] is a lyrical drama of the *Gīta-govinda* type, ... composed by a pious Zamorin of old. It is even now acted, [Raja (1910:638) continues,]

especially in the southern district of British Malabar, not by members of the professional caste, but by men specially trained for the purpose.' This is not to disregard entirely the idea that the *Gītagovinda* is related to drama. In citing G. Morey Mitter (1905:17ff), Winternitz (1920b:161) reminds us that ballad poetry across culture and dominion was associated with singing and dance, so that it seems justified to see them as a precursor for folk drama. There are also authors, and many more than mentioned here, who speak of the *Gītagovinda* being performed. Probably the earliest reference is by William Jones (1799:183) who reports about 'an annual jubilee [for Jayadeva], passing a whole night in representing his drama, and in singing his beautiful songs.' It is this passage maybe that prompted S. N. Dasgupta (1947:393) to understand the *Gītagovinda*[19]as 'intended and still used for popular festival.'. It is possible yet, that his sources or knowledge of the field go further. Dasgupta (1947:667) writes as well that "[t]he *Gīta-govinda* is actually sung in many of the temples of Viṣṇu by the temple girls in accompaniment with dancing.'

Jatra from the Fifteenth to Sixteenth century

The central thesis of the rise of popular entertainment during the decline of classical drama is well formulated by Dasgupta[20]'The breakup of the old orthodox drama was almost synchronous with the rise of Apabhraṃṣa and modern Indian literature; and along with it came popular entertainments of the type of the semi-religious Yātrā, with its mythological subject, quasi-dramatic presentation and preference of recitation and singing' (1947:508-509).This is in reference to the *Mahānāṭaka* : Dasgupta (1947:508-509): '... the presumption is not unlikely that such vernacular semi-dramatic performances of popular origin reacted on the literary Sanskrit drama and influenced its form and manner to such an extent as to render the production of such apparently irregular types greatly probable. It is not

suggested, in the absence of tradition, that such a pseudo-play was actually enacted as a Yātrā, which had little pretension to a literary character.'

In essence, Dasgupta suggests that as classical Sanskrit drama declined, popular forms of entertainment, such as the Yātrā with its mythological themes and quasi-dramatic presentation, emerged. These popular forms likely influenced the literary Sanskrit drama to some extent, resulting in the production of irregular types of drama that may not have been fully literary but had an impact on the dramatic landscape.

'As the imperfect dialogues and narrative passages were frequently supplemented, it is not surprising that a work meant for such performance increased in bulk, incorporating into itself fine recitative passages from various sources; and different versions accordingly came into circulation. The very existence of the versions shows that it was a living work, which was modified by the exigencies of time and place, and discredits the idea of a purely literary composition. in honour of the god.' 'The regeneration of Indian theatre [he (1912:178) claims] is mainly through these refined and often original plays.' From thereon at least, it is evident he had either plagiarized Chattopadhyaya (1882) or those following him, when stating that the jatra's present popularity would be largely indebted to the earlier mentioned Krishnakamala Gosvami from Dhaka. The Caitanya movement, only mentioned by Chattopadhyaya (1974:158) and Lévi (1890: 394), had thus far been of lesser significance in the more Indological research focused on the birth of drama, but finds another rough mentioning here.

Pabirta Sarkar notes (1995:117) 'The least controversial that could be said about its beginning and early evolution is that it may have sprung from an ancient form of folk-drama, but prior to the emergence of the Chaitanya movement in sixteenth century, Jatra could not boast of any definite shape. It probably existed in the form of loose song-and-dance sequences, very provisional in character, without any

pretentions of 'plot' or structure. The earliest known Jatra plays [palas in Bengali] that have come down to us dated only from the late eighteenth century.' Sarkar (1995:117-118) argues that 'But before prose began being extensively used in literature from the early nineteenth century, jatra palas remained more lyric sequences held together by a slender and meandering story-line, than well-structured plays. Around the sixteenth century, Jatra became the most popular entertainment, having pushed the musical narration-cum-puppet dance to the background.' Pabirta Sarkar (1995:118) also notes 'But this fact alone cannot positively affirm what has been called the Krishnite origin of Jatra. It is more likely that Shaivite, Sakta, and other sects also tried to exploit and mold this popular theatre-form for their own sectarian benefit, but were not as successful as the Vaishnavas were. One thing is clear: no Jatra play which had the feeblest claim to structure could exist before there arose structured narratives in the Bengali literature.'

Jatra as the Child of Sanskrit Plays

Publications on theatre and performance after the 1930s partly talk about jatra, but largely about its twentieth century avatar. Even though there must be other publications, which may have been missed out in this survey, it would not be misplaced to state that the discourse about origin and age of Indian drama lost attraction over time, appeared too tedious, and remained either highly speculative or lost validity along the way. The chapter that Kapila Vatsyayan (1980:137) devoted to the jatras epitomizes this view. She writes that the 'origins of Oriya and Bengali Yātrā are somewhat hazy and the discussion has been full of controversies and widely divergent views. It is neither necessary nor productive for us to trace the history of these controversies.' It might however have helped to really study the subject before making unfounded claims. A scholarly comment about the *Gītagovinda* as the 'beginning of dramatic presentation

in Bengal' is false and does not need further comment in light of the present survey on the Vaishnava theory of origin. However, Vatsyayan (1980:137) writes, that 'despite opposing views all historians and literary critics have drawn attention to the mention of the Yātrā in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and have also attributed the beginnings of dramatic presentation in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to Jayadeva's *Gīta Govinda*.' The *Nāṭyaśāstra*, for uncertain reasons, is hardly, if ever, evident in the jatra discourse, as far at least as the publications cited in this survey are concerned. As a matter of fact, the jatras are notably absent from Vatsyayan's (2001) own publication on the *Nāṭyaśāstra* wherein no such performance is terminologically mentioned in any case. With regard to the jatra, as documented since the outgoing nineteenth century, it could have been argued however, that one or the other form described in the "Ten Kinds of Plays," would betray a sense of correlation (*Nāṭyaśāstra* chapter 20; see Ghosh 1851: 355-379)[21]21. Asutosh Bhattacharyya (1995:105) in fact does so, but without giving detailed reference or explanation. About Bharata, he writes 'he mainly devoted his work to the classical Indian drama, yet he mentions casually the existence of a form of popular drama which was in vogue among the common people during his time.' Why the *Nātyaśāstra* is often given such prominence has been briefly discussed in the introduction (p. 04) and this here might count as a generic case for a tendentious or strictly speaking concocted national narrative by a top-ranking government official with preference to the *mārgī*. With a slight sardonic undertone Dinesh Chandra Sen (1911:5) writes '[t]he more cultured ranks of our society under Hindoo rule delighted in the study of classical Sanskrit ... and the vernacular literature deemed it always a great honour and privilege if it could only now and then obtain an approving nod from the aristocracy.' This very orientation leads Vatsyayan (1980:138) to the hypothesis that 'many conventions of the Yātrā flow directly or indirectly from conventions of the

Sanskrit theatre. Indeed, [she writes,] its basic structure is a carryover from the Sanskrit tradition although its later growth has been distinctly regional. ... The enactment of Sanskrit plays was known both to Bengal and Orissa, and ... [n]aturally the Yātrā must have drawn upon ... both the Sanskrit tradition and regional artistic forms.' Vatsyayan's (1980:138) explains that '[t]his fact is evident from an analysis of its literary material and its artistic form and technique.' This 'fact,' though supported by a few Sanskrit plays known to have been staged in Bengal, remains unexplained and thus appears rather hypothetical. Yet, as a thesis it has to be given the benefit of doubt, even though a mutual influence would have been a better framework in the absence of hard facts. One of the general problems of philological work is the prominence of the textual form overshadowing apparently unknown oral culture.

Folk narration, as in the case of Valmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, for example, has been the usual culture medium but subsequently it became representative of an epic, spawning uncountable regional adaptations. In contrast to Vatsyayan (1980), Bhattacharyya (1995:105) holds that an independent development of the jatras is possible. He thinks, '[i] t seems that a folk form of drama which existed during the time of Bharata developed independently without any way being effected by the classical Sanskrit drama.' Winternitz (1920B:165-166) sees the unwritten popular folk performances as the substrate for the refined literary drama and so does Konow (1920:44), even though not exclusively.[22]

Origin of jatra, in the context of Shiva and Shakti as an alternative theory of origin, has been argued by scholars such as Hemendra Nath Das Gupta (1934:22). On the other hand, Chattopadhyaya suggests (1973:134) that Shaiva influence is less suitable for jatras and that Shaiva traditions may have been inspired by Vaishnava influences. Von Schroeder (1908:16-19) argues that Rudra-Shiva is equally important, though Krishna's influence may be dominant.

While critiquing Chattopadhyaya in an interesting way, he says (1908:72) that it is difficult to ascertain the balance of importance between Vishnu & Shiva.[23] Exploring the origin from the point of folk[24] deities and culture, one might be able to establish a connection between jatra and Buddhist[25] Drama and might be able to shed some light on the potential influence of Buddhism on the development of jatra. The study of jatra during the period of the Sultanate, from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century can also be interesting. Ernest Philip Horrwitz (1912:176) begins his account by talking about the Mughals, who, he claimed, had 'abolished every music hall and playhouse.' Nevertheless 'dramatic activity was once more in full swing towards the end of the fourteenth century, more particular in Nepal and Tirhut.'

Thoughts on the Jātrākāras, the makers of early jatra could be the Brahmans as understood from Winternitz (1920b:164) who wrote about Brahman as writers. Berriedale Keith [1924: 46] and Karl Mantzius (1903:64-65) suggest that Brahmans write drama. However, '…it does not seem probable that the actual composition or production of Jatra was originally or ended, ever confined to one particular caste or class in Bengal. The jatra like any other dramatic forms anywhere else in the world has connection with religious worship but not necessarily belong or patronized by any particular caste or community rather belong to entire Bengali community' (Guha Thakurta 1930:18-19).[26]

On the Nature of Jatra in Precolonial Bengal

Unfortunately, though not surprisingly, nothing much can be learned from the literature about the nature of pre-colonial jatra. There are two statements that appear repeatedly throughout all the literature, which none of the authors question.

Extempore Dialogue Interspersed with Popular Songs have been a major feature of the performance.

A statement that became important in light of subsequent authors, is by Wilson (1827a:viii) that jatra is 'maintained ... in extempore dialogue, but interspersed with popular songs.' This statement remains unsubstantiated, but the second edition of the second volume of Wilson's book (1835:414-415) carries a further comment on jatra which has been overlooked or disregarded by subsequent researchers, but might provide the necessary clue. The general content of the paragraph pertains to the beginning of the nineteenth century and will be discussed later on (p. ...). Sufficient to mention now, even though the observation is contemporary, is that the play under discussion, *Chitra Yajna*, is a Shaiva play. Wilson (1835:415) states the 'business alone [is] being sketched by the author, and the whole of the dialogue supplied by the actors. The dialogue is diversified by songs, which are written and learnt by heart.' In his brief introduction Klein (1865:97; 1866:372), had already adopted Wilson's (1827a:viii) statement about 'the extempore dialogues ... interspersed with popular songs' and decided to call jatras impromptu plays intermixed with songs. The last section of Klein's (1866:372) chapter devoted to Indian drama is entirely replicated from Wilson's, (1835:412-415) so his statement about Bengali jatras modelled on the play *Chitra Yajna,* is repeated, as is the fact that dialogues remain imperfect and are supposed to be improvised by the actors along with stage direction. The argument then travels to Chattopadhyaya, (1974:176) who attempts to enumerate basic features of jatra in five points. Number four establishes that 'Yatras consist principally of songs ... with very imperfectly developed dialogue' while number five adds that they 'consist also occasionally of improvisations.'

[When Chattopadhyaya (1974:176) describes jatra as consisting 'principally of songs ... with very imperfectly developed dialogue' and 'occasionally of improvisation,' he is already referring to the nineteenth century.]

Leopold von Schroeder (1887) draws his ideas from Wilson (1827a:viii), Lassen (1852:504) and Chattopadhyaya,

(1974:176) creating a pastiche of different accounts as mentioned earlier (see page ...). In connection with a kind of religious festival such as the Mystery plays of the European middle age, von Schroeder (1887:579) hypothesizes that dance, music and song were the central elements of performances while prosaic speech and dialogue for the larger part, presumably improvised.

SONGS:

Von Schroeder (1908:13) (fn) states that songs play a dominant role in the oldest Indian drama, especially in the so-called jatras, the Mystery plays of the Krishna cult (of course after Chatto) – (see also page 16) dance followed song ... Hertel (1904:167-168) 'wie in den aus den yatra bekannten Improvisationen.' The direct or indirect reference to Chattopadhyaya (1882) is quite likely, given Macdonell's (1900:347) comparison with the Christian mystery plays and a certain conclusion which reappears frequently, that jatras are 'a kind of religious plays, in which scenes from the legend of the god were enacted mainly with the aid of song and dance, supplemented with prose dialogue improvised by the performers.' Oldenberg (1903:239) seems to have taken the statement from Chattopadhyaya (1882), which appears in a recent footnote, and rephrases it slightly, writing that often the dialogue would not be the authors work but be improvised by the actors. Karl Mantzius (1903:64) writes that '[t]he dialogue is only worked out in a fragmentary way; most of it is improvised by the actors' and most probably repeats Wilson's (1827a:viii) statement, via Klein (1865:97) Strangely, the author seems to extend that argument onto the *Gitagovonda*[27] as well.

Guha-Thakurta suggests that (1930:9) 'It is quite probable that at a very early stage the Yātrāwālas used to extemporize the music[28] and words of the plays to suit a specific religious festival or social entertainment and that they made no serious attempt at literary composition or publication.

Winternitz (1920b:165) 'Es ist begreiflich, daß uns von diesen volkstümlichen, wahrscheinlich größtenteils improvisierten Stücken nichts erhalten ist. Sie waren nur für den Augenblick geschaffen und verschwanden mit dem Augenblick.' Yajnik agrees in his claim that (1933:54) 'no doubt, at an early stage, the yātrāvālās used to extemporize the music and words of the plays to suit particular festivals, literary composition or publication being out of the question.'

Dasgupta (1947:393) 'Though cast in a semi-dramatic mould, the spirit is entirely lyrical; though modelled perhaps on the prototype of the popular Kṛṣṇa-yātrā in its musical and molodramatic peculiarities, it is yet far removed from the old Yātrā by its want of improvisation and mimetic qualities.'

A Brief Note on Dance

With von Schroeder (1908:14-16) [and all other authors] claiming that dance is to be seen as the earliest version of performance, one would need to conclude that this counts for early (or especially early according to Hertel and ...) jatra as well, Lévi being the special promoter of this.[29]

Language in Precolonial jatra was in a transition. Dinesh Chandra Sen (1911:13) explains that 'The view generally taken by foreign scholars, that this process of Sanskritizing made the literary language incomprehensible to the masses, is not tenable. When a village yātrā, or popular theatrical performance, is going on, ploughmen, shopkeepers and other illiterate people will stand patiently for hours, witnessing the scenes. ... [H]undreds of ... words which are never used in their current dialect, come pouring in upon their ears, and these they enjoy immensely. Winternitz (1920b:173-174) demonstrates interchanging Sanskrit and Prakrit on stage.'

In conclusion, we find that we can at best speculate whether early jatra(s) as travelling theatre ever existed as known from the twentieth century. However, in a non-linear

evolution and given the possible cross-fertilisation of genres, much could have been possible. The well-known and often quoted twentieth chapter of the *Natyashastra*, for example, lists various theatre forms that are not far from what mythological jatra could be imagined to have been.[30] Rocher says that Vishnu dominates a bit in the puranas and also reminds us that the avatara principle is largely connected to vishnu (not shiva so much, in common knowledge). For some reason the Saiva puranas — and, hence, Siva in the puranas— have been less well received than the Vaisnava puranas. According to Barth the Saiva puranas 'are the most spiritless of the collection.' They are like the Tantras, and 'affect a very special, almost an esoteric character.' Except for such pieces as the Devimahatmya, Saivism 'appears to have inspired no work of any brilliancy, such as the Bhagavata Purana. And the Puranas were supposed to speak to the soul of the people. Dasgupta 1947:667: 'Though the poem has an erotic form particularly to lay readers, to the devotees of Hari they do not excite any sex passion or idea but fill their minds with the splendour of the divine amour between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. It is not so much an expression of the longing of the human soul symbolised in Rādhā and God symbolised in Kṛṣṇa, but to a real Vaiṣṇava it appears as the delineation of the transcendental amours of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa into which the devotee enters through religious sympathy and devotion.'

Notes

1. The original Sanskrit Harṣadeva *Ratnāvalī* is a *nāṭikā* (see Winternitz 1920b:168; Haas 1912:95-98; Schuyler 1991:39-41, 103; Wilson 1835:255-319).
2. Annotation: Nineteenth-century indological writing reflects to an extent the discursive dominance of Western academics over its (former) colonial territories and might even feature unqualified comparative judgements. It often exhibits a certain Euro-centric point of view, but also a certain spirit at the dawn of European exploration into the outside world

driven by the attempt to get closer to its own interrelated history. This in a way, is the birth of world (art) history and various comparative studies that have gained much wider attention in the 21st century. Comparison with European Mystery Plays or Greek theatre will be generally passed over but might be reserved for a different research purpose.

3. This *saṅgīta* argument is widely, but not consistently, repeated in the subsequent discourse, but is never considered to be of central importance and has thus been omitted in this survey.
4. See *kuśīlava* in Monier-Williams et al. (1960:297). The matter is also taken up by Klein (1866:45-46) (see following paragraph) and discussed by Lévi (1890:312-313).
5. The proper costumes might go back on Wilson (1827a:ix) characterising the "*Rása* [that] partakes more of the ballet, but it is accompanied also with songs, whilst the adventures of Krishna or Rama, are represented in appropriate costume, by measured gesticulations."
6. His PhD thesis was originally published in English by Trubner & Co. London, in 1882. The German version was published a year late along other essays from Zürich by Rudolphie & Klemm. The version referred here is a reprint of the 1882 publication.
7. *Mahābhāṣya* references follow the Kielhorn/Abhyankar edition.
8. Note that prior to Chattopadhyaya (1882), first Klein (1866:51), then Weber (1873:491) and Barth (1879:100) mentioned the Mystery Plays as a comparative, without however initiating a further discussion.
9. Viswanātha Śāstri (1854:vii) wrote it "belongs to a class technically termed *Nátaka*" and would due to long winding aimless dialogues and a "lack of unity of action ... fail in performance, to master the sympathy of a large and promiscuous audience". – Dating after Śāstri (1854:xiv).
10. Note Guha-Thakurta (1930:4), who quotes Sylvain Lévi (1890) probably not realising, or at least not indicating, that his statement is based on Chattopadhyaya (1882).
11. See as well Konow (1920:38-39) who summarises Hertel (1904, 1909).
12. In Hertel's (1909) response to von Schroeder's criticism, in the following year, his jatra argument goes by the board

and the continuation of the Vedic drama is shifted to the *Suparṇādhyāya* – See as well Konow (1920:39) who summarises von Schroeder (1908).

13. This is seized cursory by Berriedale Keith (1911:1001) who also partakes in the complex discourse around the Vedic drama and discusses von Schroeder and other authors.
14. It may be noted here that Guha-Thakurta (1930:4) has not pointed out or not realised that Horrwitz (1912) does not have an "opinion" but rather repeats others.
15. See for example Winternitz (1920b:165), Lüders (1940:414, 422), Klein (1866:45-46), Hillebrandt (1918), Keith (1920) or Weber (1873:492-494). It is likely that the sort of down-to-earth performers can shed further light on early performance culture and thus jatras, but up to date any such systematic study is outstanding.
16. Cited as well by Guha-Thakurta (2000:2-3).
17. The following publications have been referred to or briefly discussed by Guha-Thakurta (2000) in regard to the early or ancient jatra: Wilson (1827a), Lassen (1852), Klein (1865, 1866), Weber (1873), Barth (1879), Chattopadhyaya (1882), von Schroeder (1887, 1908), Lévi (1890), Macdonell (1900), Mantzius (1903).
18. Given the nature of this survey as reference, it might be annotated here that with the intention to quote Klein (1966:51) Das Gupta (1934:90) refers to the wrong volume and page number. Macdonell (1900), moreover, did not "start a new theory about the origin of drama" but rather availed himself of previous research.
19. Dasgupta (1947:396ff) Vaishnava pieces modelled after Gitagovinda - goes into Chaitanya pieces (important) - Dasgupta (1947:510) Rāmakṛṣṇa *Gopāla-keli-candrikā* (Caland refers to as jatra - see Winternitz 1920a:137), along Winternitz Krishna Plays: Klein (1866:370) - Wilson (1835:400-) Klein has taken from Wilson: Kansa Badha (17th century) example for Krishna plays. Also see Sen (1960:88, 170). Yajnik (1933:53) "Now it is obvious that with the ruin of the classical drama proper, after the rise of the Mohammedan power, the lower species came more into prominence and then contributed largely to the village drama. Of course, artistic subtlety

disappeared. The old rules of decorum were violated in order to satisfy the desire of the masses to see the death of demons like Rāvaṇa and Kaṁsa."

20. See summary 511. Berriedale Keith [1924:] 17 short Gītagovinda (drama origin), DAS GUPTA, Hemendra Nath (1934:114) Chaitanya Period, Bhattacharyya (1995:109) Chaitanyas performance mentioned only, Moriz Winternitz (1920a:124ff) Winternitz (1920b:164-165) Dasgupta (1947:396) Vaishnava pieces modelled after Gitagovinda, Viswanātha Śāstri (1854:xiv) CHAITANYA CHAPTER: in this play they see a play were chaitanya acts, HORRWITZ passage: In the following, Horrwitz (1912:29) directly leaps into either the fifteenth or nineteenth century writing abut the revival of jatra and not its origin. "The Krishna cult has been successfully revived in Bengal, and numerous *yâtras or melodramas have been* composed.
21. In addition to that, Dhanaṃjaya's *Daśarūpa* gives an even wider variety of plays presumably known to the stages, some of which might just appeal suitable for a comparative study with the earliest know jatras. For details see George C. O. Haas (1912).
22. Another matter to be discussed is the adaptation of Sanskrit drama in the 19th century - maybe Ratnavali as an example (page 8).
23. Horace Hayman Wilson (1827:1), Lévi (1890:318) Shiva as Patron of Drama, Sten Konov (1920:37) Natyashstra seems to be generally avoided because of Shiva, Dasgupta (1947:396) Rama & Sita and Hara & Parvati adaptations of the Gitagovinda ... which is a point for Lassen to see the impulse of such (if) dramatic poetry through Vaishnava literatureDasgupta (1947:654) Śakas and the Sanskrit Drama.
24. SARKAR, Benoy Kumar / RAKSHIT, Hemendra K. ass. (1917) The Folk-Element in Hindu Culture. A Contribution to the Socio-Religious Studies in Hindu Folk-Institutions. Calcutta: Longmans, Green and Co.
    See Yajnik (1933:57) / Asutosh Bhattacharyya (1995:106).
25. Winternitz (1920b:180-183) generally chapter zu buddhist drama, Dasgupta (1947:654) Buddhistic Dramas.
26. Also see Vatsyayan's (1980:142) caste in jatra.

27. Ridgeway (1915:157) - Cites Macdonell's (1900:347), Mantzius (1903:64) IMPROVISATION (Gītagovinda dialogues).
28. Also see SEN, Sukumar (1960:177) EXTEMPORE - SONGS
29. See also von Schroeder (1908) who gives the whole passage on nart. Yajnik (1933:55) / Winternitz (1920b:163) root 'nart' / Dasgupta (1947).
30. See Ghosh 1851: 355-379.

CHAPTER 3

Jatra in Colonial Bengal

Jatra in undivided Bengal during the colonial regime, which lasted from the late eighteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, underwent significant changes and adaptations, reflecting the social, cultural, and political realities of the time. The continuities from the medieval to modern Bengal in the jatra palas have significant impact from newly formed literature and thereby cultural manifestations. The current chapter situates jatra in the context of social and political reformation. The incorporation of modern themes and issues into jatra performance included that of characters and storyline. This eventually reflected contemporary concerns like anti-colonialism and led to the classification of jatra as a tool of subversion. Fitting well into the binary of folk and modern, this was also the time of professionalization of jatra companies for the first time in specific regions or communities.

The New Literary Style of Bharat Chandra Ray in the 18th Century

Although Viashnavism in Bengal had been a predominant cultural movement, its literature did not impose upon other traditional lyrics and songs. During the late medieval Bengal, one would not identify the dominance in the new set of Bengali literature of Bharatchandra, Alaol, Jagat Ram etc., which focused on the indigenous religious figures rather than the ideal of universal love and devotional ecstasy of Vaishnavism. The post-Chaitanya literature, which muddied

classical taste, can only be traced to the court of Raja Krishna Chandra of Nadia/Nabadwipa, whose kingdom had become a center of religious movements, learning and art and culture, as Banerjee historicises. Dinesh Chandra Sen (1911: 615) describes the declining literary society from this century, where he finds 'the poets struggling to furnish long and wearisome details about a small point...This was an age when Mohamedian power had just decayed...Raja Krishnachandra was hostile to the followers of Chaitanya. However, the new kind of royal patronage to poetry emerged where tribute to God was no longer the ritual but pleasing the fancy of a Raja became the prime focus like a Sanskrit poem like Nishada Charita and also Persian poems like Zelekha about serving women in the court. Bengali Hindu poets had an impact of Persian poems / court literature as well.' Sen further traces that 'in this age, a rigid classical taste gave a unique finish to Bengali style and enriched it with the variety of Sanskrit meteres that so powerfully appeal to the ear Bharat Chandra Ray "Gunakar"[1](1712-1760), the court poet of Raja Krishan Chandra.' (*Ibid*:621). The Bengali poet composed these verses in the eighteenth century and he was well versed in Bengali and Sanskrit as well as Persian and Indian classical music. Bharatchandra, 'a true representative of the transition period between medieval and modern Bengali literature' is also popular due to his lucidity and 'simple lyrical forms to be sung by the ordinary people. These were about the gods and goddesses, but he also infused a lot of ordinary human emotions and actions for them to become familiar and popular to the listeners and performers. Bharat Chandra's Bengali narrative poem Ananda Mangala's written between 1752-1753 in three parts. Annadamangal is essentially a eulogy to Goddess Durga as Annapurna is the first part. The second part is titled Kalikamangal or Vidya-Sundar and is mainly an erotic tale. The third part is titled Mansingha or Annapurnamangal. It describes Mughal courtly culture—Mansingha being one of the nine "gems" of the Mughal emperor Akbar's court. Taken

together they represent the transition of classics to modern Bengali literature (Chattopadhyay Bewtra[2]). His style of poem is described by Saubhik Dhar (2010) as follows[3]:

> 'Bharat Chandra was the last poet of the Style 'Mangal-Kabya'[4]. Though he followed these age-old styles, he was driven by modern styles which give Mangal-Kabya a new dimension. In his other poems he portrayed the sorrow, problems and political disturbances of the society. Even from his poems we can know that ill-judicial system used to prevail at those times. In his poems the problems which are portrayed were the huge tax affected the common people, the trade and business get blow from Portuguese Pirates, and attacks of Bargis-a south Indian Section of people who make the life of Bengal's people more disastrous. Even the difference of society regarding the wealth gets prominent during that time.'

'*The narratives are borrowed from various puranic text, chronicles and legends*[5] *including popular hear says. The surviving manuscripts*[6] *of the text were dated from 1776 to 1829*[7]*. Annada Mangal was first published by Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya in 1816. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar's edition of the poem is now considered as the standard one.*' Ananadamangal was never translated in other languages except by a Russian playwright Lebedeff, who translated parts of the poem and used it in the musical composition of his plays staged in Calcutta. Later, he translated parts of Annadamangal, including Vidyasundar, into Russian.

The king also patronised Ramprasad Sen,[8] a folk poet and contemporary of Bharat Chandra. Both differed in their style, in language, and treatment. Though they often dealt with similar topics but they catered to different audiences, putting out their creations parallely—in the court and outside of it, in medieval Bengal. Bharatchandra tended to lean towards the traditional romantic vein of Sanskrit classics; he wrote in Sanskritised Bengali and chose his imagery from the court's environment. On the other hand, Ramprasad leaned towards more 'down to earth tradition of the colloquial

Bengali folk songs,' using Arabic terms that were common and popular all over Bengal, from the peasant class of rural Bengal to mendicant friars in the streets of Calcutta. Close to many other folk poets, the latter created one of the most popular forms of entertainment called tarja, where two or more poets (also called kabis) are engaged in poetic duels. (Banerjee: 1989:80-83). Both these literary trends—Sanskritic and folk lore as shared experience, have deeply impacted Jatra and other performing art practices, which catered to all strata in the society.

The improvization from musical Jatra to development of crude dramatic aesthetics began the trend of professional Jatra in eighteenth century with the Adhikaris' of Birbhuum area. They continued playing Kaliya Daman, one of the episodes from the Krishna story Jatras.

Parmanand Adhikari's[9] Jatra is the incorporation of more acting and dialogues, while the lyrical and melodramatic style continued. More importantly, the Adhikaris introduced Jatras of human interest over and above only of Krishna themes by the end of the eighteenth century. Gobinda Adhikari (1798-1870) was from a poor Vaishnavite family and played female roles. Lokenath Das, also known as Loko Dhoba and Boko, and his brother Sadhu were two muslims, who were reported to have staged Jatras on episodes from the Ramayana in the middle of nineteeth century[10].

Medieval Bengal, like any other states in India, also experienced changes in the political reigns, with the beginning of the decline of Hindu power, advent and fall of the Muslims and rise of the British empire in 1857. Thereby began a social hierarchy on the basis of cultural and economic capital among the urban and rural population.

Colonial Jatra: Transitions & Transformations

Colonial Bengal became the Bengal Presidency of the British empire, which created and established a new Bengal. Undergoing these major transformations: the emergence

of Bengal renaissance, radical nationalism, a new wave of revolutionary culture, urbanization and Westernization, not only changed the Bengali social structure but also challenged the native culture. Sumanta Banerjee's (1989) detailed social and cultural account of nineteenth century Calcutta sheds light on two dominant cultures, namely folk and elite, within the ambit of a negotiated and a contested cultural movement related to socio-cultural processes. What happened to the folk artists in a newly generated elite and educated class? In this section I will therefore, focus on how the folk artists, as Banerjee theorizes, 'created irreverent and iconoclastic world opposition, a second life in opposition to the official world of the strict rituals and stiff restraints of Bhadralok' (respectable educated classes) (*Ibid*. 144). He further outlines that the social structure in nineteenth Century Calcutta/Bengal was a changing one. Firstly, there was an emergence of the public sphere in Calcutta, which has since then been a melting pot and the first urban centre of modern India, balancing between old and new ideas due to multiple social forces. The nineteenth-century literary sphere in Bengal witnessed a period of struggle between the popular indigenous inheritance in poetry and the formulation of a new modern poetry after English poetic convention; classical and folk languages, nouveau urban and mixed languages, colonial and 'native' languages, played an instrumental role in the many negotiations between modernity and the nation in early nineteenth-century Bengal, states Rosnika Choudhury (2009). However these two distinct stands of dramatic literature: Indigenous literature and modern Bangla literature, continued to stage their performances parallel and distinct from each other.

Kapila Vatsyayan delineates that British rule introduced permanent land settlements and the rising gentry was prosperous. Riches flowed and with the new wealth came the desire for entertainment. Festive occasions and Jatra troupes were invited. Love themes, erotic stories, stories of mythological heroes, historical romances, tales of legendary

robbers, saints, social reformers and champions of truth and justice, secular and more contemporary themes abounded. As political consciousness was growing, palas against the British were written and performed. Jatra underwent thematical and musical changes in every period but it retained its special flavour (1980:142).

Within the impact of colonial modernity and rise of nationalist movement, parallel developments in the nineteenth century were:

1. Revival of Popular Medieval Bengali literature in folk plays like Jatra
2. Establishment of European Theater and Emergence of Bengali drama from classical Sanskrit plays on European model
3 Emergence of Swadeshi Jatra as a tool for anti-partition agitation, boycott movement and national consciousness.

Evidences on dramatic literature during the next period are scanty as most of the historians have confessed. No existing specimen of popular Jatras is preserved. As Pabitra Sarkar rightly maintains, the history of Jatra revolves around personalities like Gopal Ure, Matilal Roy, or Mukunda Das, rather than types or form (1995:119). This was a nonlinear movement and a period of 'tensions as well as reconciliations among three major genres of drama: Sanksritic, Western and indigenous folk traditions and the Parsi Theater as Sisir Das (1961) aptly analyses. Das assumes that 'with some justification that the traditional performances continued in full vigour and the taste of the general spectators was conditioned by the strong traditions of folk theater...musical plays. ... The Western impact we feeble. ... The main reason was the presence of powerful dramatic literature in Sanskrit ... popular dramatic traditions were too strongly rooted to be ignored by a change in the artistic taste of elite. They surfaced quite often in adaptations from classical Sanskrit or in the plays claimed to be constructed on the western model.' (1961:117-118).

Bengal witnessed a transition from old Bengali literature (of medieval period) as discussed earlier, to modern Bengali literature or the period from the death of the first 'People's poet' of Bengal, Bharat Chandra Roy in 1760, to the death of his follower Ishwar Chandra Gupta in 1858, as traced by Sushil Kumar De (1919:296). On one hand, a generation of modern Bengali literature (largely prose[11]) was modernized by the influence of English ideas and literature, 'generally by the spirit of intellectual aristocracy.' And on the other hand, another section of Bengali writers in a 'distinct phase of literary development' continued to write poems driven by the essence of native genius of medieval times 'even with declining powers, the literary traditions of the past... they were essentially national in sentiment and expression representing in contrast to the writings of Europeans.' Like other Indian regional and aristocrat poetry divide 'where art, not life, was the criterion, was slowly withering out while the poetry of Nazir and Isvar Chandra Gupta, closer to the mundane experience, made cracks in the wall that kept the "poetic" and the "non-poetic" worlds apart' (Das:1961:100). Gupta is a Bengali poet of early 19th century did not have any formal education (English education). According to Sisir Kumar Das, 'his sense of realism and his quick response to the changing world around him made the creator of a new, not necessarily great, poetry different from the tradition-bound Bengali poets. He wrote about the festivals, and fruits and animals and all kinds of themes, which were considered trivial and common-place, according to the poetic canons of the day.' (1961:65). The followers of Iswar Gupta and Bharatchandra introduced variants of mythological stories in Jatra. The 'inferior and insignificant poets' of rural Bengal, influenced by Gupta and Bharat Chandra, kept the old form of expressions that appeared 'contemptible' by the western educated young Bengalis. The antagonism between two parallel literary tendencies continued throughout the nineteenth century.

The indigenous poetical/lyrical genres that emerged

in this era though, are very scattered and under studied. Three kinds of folk culture manifested. For instance verbal composition (songs), recitation of rhyme during rituals-bratas (Panchalis) and poetical contests like Kabigan[12] (recitation), Tappas[13] (light kind of music suited to love songs), Kathakatha[14] (one actor singing a religious story), Jhumar (duet songs with a bit of dance and dialogue) keertan (devotional singing) and spectacles of Jatra along with swangs (comic shows of the streets) flourished in rural Bengal. These poetic forms have influenced Jatra enormously. For instance, Kabi songs were attached to Jatra initially though they got separated eventually. However, Panchalis and Jatra, forms of entertainment were recognized as indigenous literature due to their 'literary pretensions' (*Ibid*). Though Panchalis, with multigeneric writers and once very popular in the late eigteenth and early nineteenth centuries, disappeared from modern Bengal the with start of professional Jatras and amateur parties. With the addition of instrumental music and vocal music, dramatic openings were evolving slowly. This interculturalism among the folk artists, and later its dissemination among the urban lower orders, were due to the migration of rural populations to metropolis Calcutta. They brought this rich repertoire of entertainment along and continued the legends inherited from rural poets. The social fabric of Calcutta was fragmented by zamindars, litterateurs, rich businessmen as well as their poor neighbours —labourers in Jute factories, railway coolies etc. dwelling in slums. Therefore, the new culture of indulgences like that in food, smoking, the drinking habits of the rich and educated middle classes turned to become poor people's amusements, leading to composition of songs that mocked the higher classes in the city.

The Age of Hybridization: Vidyasundar Jatra

Jatra of rural Bengal moved to Calcutta, as professional Jatra companies were established with the patronage of babus.

There were two types of babus — one was a class of babus who advocated the secular themes and styles[15] and the other class was a middle section — 'people who wanted to liberate Jatra from "low art" influences and others return it to hallowed days of the Baishnab religious/devotional Krishnajatras' (Chatterjee:2007:123). Therefore, audiences with evolving tastes also appreciated the new rendering of Jatra performance of both religious and secular styles.

The rural poetry genres were the creation of the devotional poets, recreating Krishanlilas in a 'refreshingly original and poetical way.' The writings were profuse in print between 1836 and 1870.[16] Many other rural poetries not considered as literature and performance genres during this period have no trace in print as the poets were known as 'inglorious and unknown' and these survived only orally though some accounts say that the more reputed names were known. The printed versions of popular Jatras can be accessed from 1825-1840s with Krishna Kamal Goswami (1810) of Dacca (Krishna Jatras) and Gopal Uriya/Ude/Udey[17] (1819-1857) of Jajpur and in Odisha (Vidyasundar Jatra). The printed versions of miscellaneous poetries must have also existed, as De 1847 (1962:437) traces the printing of secular themes of mythology or romance, like Vidyasundar, to 1836. These texts later became the prevalent themes with the new literary and aesthetics written in European models to some extent.

Many popular versions of Vidyasundar also got printed. The poets or versifiers followed Bharat Chandra's style of Vidyasundar and the dramatized version was adapted into an extreme popular Jatra in 1840, and into Bengali drama in 1835. A Bengali play by Jyotindranath Tagore was also translated into a Hindi play by Bharatendu in 1868, and was also turned into a movie in 1935. Vidyasundar Jatra, as Chatterjee recounts, saw the introduction of 'new stage devices and internal norms with stock characters emerged in this new, hybridised jatra' in response to popular tastes, (*Ibid*:123).

Vidyasundar, a romantic poem of Medieval Bangla

literature based on the love between Vidya and Sundar drew heavily on Chaurapavchashika, a work by the Sanskrit poet Vilahana composed in the eleventh century. The plot is as follows: the beautiful and accomplished prince Sundar obtained a boon to marry the beautiful and scholarly princess Vidya by pleasing goddess Kalika through his devotion. Sundar then reaches the kingdom of Vidya along with a parrot given to him by the goddess. He pleases the princess with love letters and paintings sent through the flower girl of the palace and they fall in love. Sundar then enters into the bedroom of Vidya through a tunnel and has sexual intercourse with her. But when Vidya becomes pregnant, her father becomes furious. The angry king then sentences Sundar to death by impaling. Sundar, however, saves his life by pleasing the goddess and then marries Vidya. (Prasun Choudhury)

Chaudhury highlights that Bharat Chandra's hero and heroine—the Dravidian prince, Sundar, and the princess of Burdwan, Vidya—were mortals. However, the divine influence was not completely missing—in their previous birth they had been lesser gods who were banished from heaven for their illicit amour. 'But their mortal incarnation allowed Bharat Chandra to narrate their romance and sexual escapades in a manner that was till then unexplored,' adds (Devajit) Bandyopadhya.[39] Further, the story 'traces the couple's earthly incarnation and continuing romance. As the narrative goes, angered by the dalliances of Vidya and Sundar, the King sentenced the latter to death. And he would be dead had it not been for Annada, a goddess who descended on earth to save him.' The performance, staged around 1835, was a grand success as described by Chaudhury.[49]

The play ran through the night. The production was recklessly lavish. The wealthy babu Nabin Chandra Basu had spent over Rs 1 lakh to create something resembling a European proscenium, with stage equipment imported from England. Since there were no professional women

actors at the time, he hired and trained prostitutes to play the female roles. Dressed in exquisite costumes and elaborately designed jewellery, their histrionics impressed the audience—300 of north Calcutta's gentry...There was no proper stage for the performance, so the different acts were staged in different parts of Basu's palatial mansion at Shyambazar, where now a tram depot stands. The audience, who had seen nothing like this, watched and cheered while enjoying a grand dinner (*ibid*).

Vidyasundar Jatra is a turning point in the history of Jatra as the style of performance got imbibed with the newness introduced by Gopal Udey. Several scholars have described his interesting entry to Jatra world as a coincidence. To quote Banerjee:

At the age of eighteen he came from Orissa to Calcutta, possibly in 1835. He used to sell bananas in the street of the city. His hawker's cry attracted the attention of a rich Bengali Babu, a lover of songs, Radhamohan Sarkar, who discovered in Gopal's voice the potential of a great singer. In his troupe of jatra performers, Gopal first acted in the role of the flower seller Malini in Vidyasundar staged by Sarkar, and immediately became a hit with the Calcutta audience. (1989:103)[18].

Gopal Udey's Jatra soon became autochthonous and spread across Bengal. His styles had a quick appeal among the rural migrants in Calcutta. Gopal Udey not only introduced innovative new styles in Jatra but also established his own troupe and he rewrote the text, including composing the dialogues in the form of short, lilting verses. The songs composed for Malini were written in a musical measure used was ad-khemta, in a lively tempo, and it was sung by almost by everyone in different social spaces, like agricultural fields, streets and market squares.(Dinesh Sen 1896:376 as cited by Banerjee:104). The lyrics of the songs were familiar to the social life of the poor because they 'touch a sympathetic chord, a waggish tone with a touch of the wanton.' The songs of Malini immediately evoked the image of the land[19]

as how Malini boasts of her prowess to Sundar, to whom she promises to bring Vidya. Along with his breezy humour, Udey also introduced the famous Khemta (a jounty dance performed by both men and women) in his songs, imported from a washerman called Keshedhoba in the outskirt of Calcutta. Similar innovative styles and adaptations in Jatra-duets (song and dance sequence) and comedy scenes from the manual labour—washer men and women, sweeper and wife, street cleaners, gypsy and his city bred girlfriend, became 'raw wit, expressed in typical feminine idioms the as performed by artists in Gopal Udey's Jatra troupe. This had a quick appeal again in many Jatra groups' (Banerjee 1989:104-6).

Gopal's rendition of Vidyasundar inspired the stage productions of Gopal Udey's rendition of Vidyasundar performances, where his spontaneity could exert an influence on the Calcutta gentry, like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Dinabandhu Mitra, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and even the Tagores—Jyotirindranath and Rabindranath—who later composed some songs in the ad-khemta style, which became a distinctive mark of Jatra songs.[20] In a letter dated 14 July 1867, Jyotindranath wrote to Goonodada (Gunendranath, cousin brother of Rabindranath): 'It was Gopal Oriya's jatra that suggested the idea of projecting a theater' Benerjee therefore implicates how the production of plays by the Tagore house 'has always followed the simplicity and directness of this folk art and emphasized the musical element.' For Rabindranath Tagore, Jatra has close proximity and privilege with the audience and performers. His plays written between 1881-1910 are operatic but different from Gitabhinay. (Mukherjee 1982:24).

But the critique to Vidyasundar Jatra continued: The Jatras faced a lot criticism due its 'degeneration—change of taste and literary fashion as old form of literature was out of the fashion and seen in contemptuous terms.' Dinesh Chandra Sen (1911) projects, Vidyasundar Jatras did not have any serious element in it as it got patronized and favored by 'light-

brained aristocracy who enjoyed the humor, dances and witty sayings.' In nineteenth century Calcutta, the western educated new elite found him rather obscene in view of the overt sexuality of his descriptions (Tapan Raychaudhuri)[21].

Abhisekh Choudhury (2016)[22] in his essay on Othello in nineteenth century Bengal, while looking at the Bengali adaptation of Shakespear's Othello (Bhimsinha in 1875 by Tarinicharan) explored the oppositional strategies of the vernacular text vis a vis colonial discourse. Choudhury quotes Sanjib Chandra Chattopadhyay in this regard, who, in Bangadarshan compares Vidyasundar jatrapala with Othellos performance and critiques the Vidyasunadar jatra, saying 'jatra, especially Vidyasundar pala can never educate people.' (149-150)

'Jini desdemonake bhalobasen, tini satitwa bhalobasen:... satistwa rakhsha karile sukhsampad hoe. Kintu suska upadesh antarpursha kare na. ek desdemonar charitre England e jaha kariyachhe, sahsra updeshtha ekatra haiiye kasminkaletaha parten na..ateb jatra ki nataker nayak nayika dwara je niti ki dharmashiksha hay na emata nahe' (Pous 1279 (1872-1873), 409-15)

Desdomone is presented as an epitome of *satitwa* or chastity, which betrays Chattopadhyay's patriarchal mind set. Sushil De describes these writers as 'servile copyists reproducing the style and scheme of his Bidyasindar ... exaggerate its freedom into license' through 'poor and vulgar imitation.' However, Vidyasundar Jatra unaffectedly spread across the Bengal and other neighbouring regions to establish a new style in the performing tradition.

Mise-en-scène and Characteristics of 'Old' Jatra, mid nineteenth to mid twentieth century

The performative aspects of Jatra, from its musical form to theatrical representation on stage, bears a long history. The question of survival of folk theatre, from the medieval period to the twenty-first century, not only depends upon

its contemporaneous and reinvention at every change in society, but also its ability to retain its original structure among its audiences. The audience structure too has not changed much as it includes people from all ranks, since the patron sponsors the Jatra show and therefore it is free of cost. The early comers occupy the front seats, irrespective of their social position. Late comers, as Sen describes, do not push but 'often stood on their feet enjoying the songs for hours together without seeming to feel the inconveniences…' (1919:726)

Music

Audiences still remember that their earlier generations used to go to listen to Jatras, not to watch the performance. From its origin, Jatra has been lyrical, like any other ancient performance in Europe or elsewhere. Banerjee elaborates that the nineteenth century Jatra originated from the rituals of songs, 'dramatic elements in the compositions of these songs and dances, like conversations among various characters of the mythological stories on which they were based, lent themselves to histrionic interpretations of the performers' (1989:103). The original structure of Jatra of this century, as marked by the concert overture, the prologue, the juri or singing chorus, and the comic relief provided by the clowns[23] are still the characteristic feature of contemporary Jatra. The dramatic elements 'consists of dialogues and monologues setting forth a plot and interspersed with serious and comic episodes...The lyrical part is practically two-thirds of the performance.' Almost all actors sing throughout the performance with the help of 'Juri'[24] (literary means pair).The master singer, an expert in the theological lore of the Vaishnavas, appears often on stage in the midst of the performers and interjects, making little commentaries on the side, in order to draw the audience's attention (Sen 1911:727). He encourages the Juri singers and provides encouragement from behind. In case any one goes out of

tune or is not loud enough, 'he smartly spanks the other, much to the amusement of the whole audience' (Guha Thakurta 1930:24). The addition of new musical instruments which were borrowed from modern theater, were in vogue. Drums, during the eighteenth century and later the *tanpur,a* were the most popular instruments and by end of the nineteenth century, a host of Western instruments like table-harmonium and clarinets had found their way into Jatra orchestra. Folk instruments with loud musical chords like *Dhak*, *Khol*, *Kartal*, *Dhole* (drums of various sizes), *Kansi* (bell metal instruments played on with a stick) and *Mandira* (cymbals) were used to summon the villagers from far and wide.

Before the onset of Jatra performance, a concert begins with 'orchestral' music— playing of the deep-toned Khols, kartals, along with other stringed instruments, by a trained and efficient concert-party, for a couple of hours. For less patient audiences the long overture is like a 'stupor.' There is a preponderance of a particular style of singing, which has been adapted from Chaupadi style, to *mahajan padas* or variation of *tukko* from Kirtan. However, because of its flexible nature, Jatrawalas in the early twentieth century have infused more dramatic element than its lyrical tendencies.

These oral traditions of rural poetry are lyrical and devotional in nature and are 'ascribed to the predilection of Bengalis for the emotional and aesthetics in art and literature.' Therefore, Jatra continued to be appreciated by educated Bengalis in Calcutta due to its musical nature and the presence of Vaishnava elements in it, despite its poor theatrical aesthetics, unlike European modelled theatre. 'The Vaishnava Yatrawalas, thus strongly inspired by the hyper-aestheticism of their cult, attempted to reform the Yatra by excluding its cruder and more vulgar elements and by introducing a large number of devotional songs and love lyrics, so much so that in course of time the Krsna-Yatra ceased to be a play in the strict sense of the term, and became a musical performance, consisting entirely of songs' (Guha

Thakurta:1930:27). The audiences found emotional ecstasies in musical Jatras. The presence of a supernatural being who comes down to earth/upon the stage performing the 'right situations which cannot be adjusted without his(her) interference'. The writers of Jatra performance 'seem to make any serious attempt at constructing a consistent dramatic plot' as the only source of writing from the major mythological epics and legendary stories. Therefore, one of the mainstream Gods 'seems to be a matter of absolute necessity to bring the play to a successful conclusion' (*Ibid*: 29).

Engaging Audience

What has appealed to the audience of Jatra right from its origin? Guha Thakurta laments that 'whatever the defects inherit in artless performances of this nature may be, simplicity with which they are presented, excites the imagination of the audience. They imagine themselves seeing or hearing things which is not being capable of being acted with such imperfect stage accessories.' He was already apprehensive by 1920s that 'if elaborate devices of our modern stage-machinery, if introduced into these Yatras, would perhaps hinder, instead of helping, the naive imagination of such as unsophisticated audience' (*Ibid*: 21). This is exactly what has happened in contemporary Jatra productions after almost 90 years and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Through the songs woven with multigeneric lyrics, sung as per the demand of the scenes, the actors, singers transport the audiences/listeners. Sen describes very poignantly one of the grief scenes of Radha, episodes from Rai Unmadini by Krishna Kamal,

> 'The pathos created by Krishna's going to Mathura was the never-ending theme of old-yatras, and it was a matter, the lightest touch of which was sure to melt the hearts of all true Bengalis...So the shepherd boys sang; and as they wept, and

> the audience was moved...The yatras without any regular stage, without any scenery, without any artistic display of costumes, could rouse emotions which now-a-days we scarcely experience, while witnessing semi-European performances given on the stages of the Calcutta theaters' (1911:729-30).

The old Jatras had the power to captivate the soul and keep men and women transfixed for hours. They were carried to many mythic spaces, unstaged or even acted through their songs (*ibid*).

Although there are references[25] of real women in action on the stage in fifteenth century, where women acted in Krishna Jatras, the nineteenth century Jatra troupes mostly used young boys to act in the roles of female characters, 'which explains why young Gopal was chosen for the role of Malini in Vidyasundar' (*Ibid*).

Performance Space

Jatra, in its performance context as recorded, has always been temporary in its production. The long night performance in open air, without any proper dramatic designs on the stage, thrills the audiences. Jatra plays last the entire night, starting from early evening and sometimes even from mid-day till mid night. The staging was generally from Nat Mandir inside the private houses of Zamindars or influential persons, to the village mandaps, under a large temporary canopy. Audiences would sit all around the stage on the ground. A green room used to be just behind a square stage covered with a curtain[26]. A wooden chair would be used as a Kings throne or seating for any state official; religious dignitaries seat is either plain or covered with silk cloth depending on the sponsors investment into the stage decoration (Sen 1911). Since electric light on the stage was absent, during the change of a scene the stage accessories would keep moving or altering while the actors remained on stage or there would be a declaration by the actors about the next scene. Lamps

would be lit on the bamboo posts with wicks. However, early twentieth century Jatra performances started using kerosene or gas lamps and even electricity to light the main stage. Coloured torches were used to 'enhance the effect of dancing and gaudy court scenes' (*Ibid*). Males used to perform women characters, though unprofessional makeup or changing of makeup used to be visible if the same actor appeared in a male part in the later scene.

Perpetual Improvisation in the Performance Text

De describes that apart from its comic and melodramatic strain, Jatra has always had a well-connected plot or plots. Considering the possibilities of transforming from a fixed indigenous jatra to regular and formal jatra, the patrons and masters of Jatra always attempted perpetual changes. 'Through the necessarily slow and elaborate transition of the whole performance, the story is made to stand out clear and alive.' He quotes the writer of *Bangadarshan*,[27] that 'Yatra could never be realized in isolated scenes or songs … but the whole performance had to be witnessed from the beginning to the end' (1919:444). Mundane subjects and secular themes are incorporated into the religious jatra while introducing farcical type characters like Narad or Madhu Mangal to escape from monotony and seriousness of religious stories. It is very interesting to note that despite its flexible nature of improvisation, jatra has never adapted either to Sanskrit drama or modern Bengali drama fully or has had little connection or not even any major resemblance with European medieval Mystery or Miracle plays. In fact, in continuity from early medieval centuries, jatra persisted with essential incorporation. Deep-rooted Vaishnavism 'moulded the national life and natural character in Bengal, not favourable to the development of the yatra into the drama' (*Ibid*:446). It encouraged the musical, melodramatic and religious predilections of the jatra. The jatra performative aesthetics, followed by the codes of Sanskrit drama (though

not all groups follow strictly) begins with a religious rendering to the stage. Divided into acts and scenes, at the beginning of the play, 'Prastabana' and 'Bandana', is offered and 'Purbaranga' is followed by 'Sutradhar' (Adhikari/stage manager) introducing the play by a 'Nandi.'[28] Thereafter, the dance sequence famously known as Nata-Nati is presented.

Apart from the devotional aspects in the performance, comic relief had been introduced at regular intervals through farcical episodes depicting the lower orders (like sweeper and wife) of society. Soon, it became a ground for criticism by the modern Bengali community as these characters 'degenerated in tone and became intolerably obscene and scurrilous ... This very largely explains why with the rise of the new Bengali drama in the nineteenth century ... The Yatra has gradually fallen into popular disfavour ... [and] the plays have lost much of their original simplicity and naive charm' (*Ibid*:28-9).

Evolution from Religious Musical to Secular Theatrical: Jatra in the Age of Modern Drama

There was emergence and growth of two major modern drama traditions in three centuries: English and Bengali Private Theatre and Public Theatre. These modern dramas' impact on the indigenous art and culture, was deep and complex. The Modern Bengali Theatre, as Guha-Thakurta says: is the direct outcome of European influences (1930:xi). This played a role in identity formations, cultural performances and political maneuverings. Ultimately, theatre in the nineteenth century became the art of the public sphere (Chatterjee:2007: xxxi). The high bred and hybrid met. Colonial British theatre Houses of Calcutta conjoined with the nineteeth century Bengali upper class, desiring to make its own. Emergent Western-style Bengali theatre termed the 'Bengal Renaissance of nineteenth century' a cultural regeneration but an idea of racial (thereafter national) self-fashioning as well. (*Ibid*.11). Like the drama,

the Bengali dramatists like Dinabandhu Mitra, Micheal Madhusudan Dutta, Ramnarayan Tarakratna, Haralal Ray, Manomohan Basu and Jyotindranath Tagore were offshoots of English drama. Many original Bengali dramas were adaptations of Sanskrit plays. The emergence of epic poets of Bengal, like Micheal Madhusudan Dutta, has been a landmark development in Bengali as well as Indian theatre, for private theaters as well as public theatre. 'Michael broke the fetters of the rules of Sanskrit drama and modernized Bengali drama"(Mukherjee:1982: 29). Being an ardent English in taste, manners and intellect, Dutta embraced Christianity and 'experimented ceaselessly with diction and verse forms, and it was he who introduced blank verse—amitraksar (a form of blank verse with run-on lines and varied caesuras), the Bengali Sonnet-both Shakespearean—and many original lyric stanzas and also pioneered satirical plays, Tragic poems.'[29] Being the foremost dramatist in Bengal 'Anticipating complaints against the "foreignness" of his play, Michel wrote very boldly that "I am writing for that portion of my countrymen who think as I think, whose minds have been more or less imbued with Western ideas and modes of thinking, and that it is my intention to throw off the fetters forged for us by a servile admiration for everything Sanskrit."' (Das 50:1961). Western modernity was a simulation for the Bengali mind to create an Indian modernity.

Age of Private Theatre

It is known as the period of effort, imitation and aspiration. The staging of the first English/Shakespearean Theatre was in 1753. The Playhouse went out of existence during Nawab Siraj-ud-daula's attack in 1756. It had access to only rich elite/educated Bengalis of Calcutta who had studied as Shakespeare in school. In 1775 the second English theatre, The New Playhouse/Calcutta Theatre, was staged. Chowranghee Theatre presented plays by English

dramatists who were popular on the stage in contemporary London. David Garrick, a well-known Shakespearan actor from London directed English plays. The translations of Sanskrit plays were encouraged by the public theaters and staged before the European and Indian audience, 'but did not patronize two original Bengali plays.'[30]

The patrons of private theatres in Calcutta were largely the Rajas and Zamindars and these theatres were open to few in the mid nineteeth century. For instance, Paikpara Rajas, who patronized Michael's dramas though Belgahchia theatres during 1858-1861. For the Sanskrit translated play *Ratnabali* of Sriharsha into Bengali by Tarakratna, Raja spent 10,000 rupees for the performance. The performances were generally staged in the private houses of aristocrats and associated with eminent Bengali educationists, social reformers, intellectuals and editors of newspapers.

Public Theater: Democratization of Bengali Theater

Unlike private theatre, public theatre freed itself from the babu culture and made moves towards inclusion of an audience that was a 'miniscular representation of the city itself. The class of audience got blurred.' But the plays were still coming from elite babus and emerging middle class playwrights. The first public theatre in Calcutta presented in Bengali by Linguist/indologist Gerasim Lebedeff (Russian) in Bengally Theater on 27 Nov 1795 who translated the English play *The Disguise.*[31] It evolved due to its desire to perform for a regular public, which gave importance to both amusement and instruction, entertainment and social reform. The aesthetics and its representation were healthy counteracts to the evils of the vulgar pleasures provided by contemporary panchalis and tarjas. Support came from editors of newspapers like Amrita Bazar Patrika and a national paper, Madhyastha because of its open access to a wider public who would purchase ticket at a low price,[32] not for commercial purpose but to 'defray the expenses for the

theater.' They[33] also held charity performances. The players were all Bengali and they made all the efforts—painted scenes, admission fee, introduction of women actors, publicity in the newspaper. They toured in Dacca, Murshidabad, Varanasi and Lucknow. Unlike the engagement of English actresses in private theaters, one of the first public theaters Great National Theater introduced actresses on the stage from the red-light district of the city. Their performance space varied from some rich landlord houses, temple courtyard, to hospital areas. Later public theater was held even at the house of the Raja Dighapatia as a beginning of 'combined performance.' Plays of social reform content were borrowed from nationalists.[34] First and foremost was Dinabandhu Mitra's Nildarpan, which depicted the ruthless oppression of the British Indigo planters. This was performed in a private house in Chitpore in Calcutta and was described by National paper as 'an event of national importance.' Similarly, few other plays in early 1876, like Gajananda and Yuvaraj[35] were not only banned but led to prohibitive dramatic performance by the Governor-general of India and in March 1876 The Dramatic Performances Control Bill was introduced. Dramatic Performance Act 1876 (Further DPA) was followed vigilantly to curb patriotic sentiments and national feelings against the British Govt on the ground of 'scandalous, defamatory, seditious or obscene' dramatic performance.

Jatra, as an emerging urban folk culture, as Sumanta Banerjee terms it, created by the lower orders (culture of silence) of the city, retained its old rural folk culture in spite of the changes the city was experiencing. As their culture was silenced by the elite, this popular folk theatre form gave way to the modern Bengali theatre with the educated middle class as its patrons and participants (1989:14-15). This emerging popular urban lower-class entertainment that 'prompted the new *bhadralok* converts to Western education and disassociate themselves' (*Ibid*: 153).The social reformers on the other hand looked down upon the folk performative

traditions like Panchali, Kavigan and jatra performance. The public theater dramatist Girish Chandra Ghosh was opposed to the idea of marginalizing folk culture. He rejected the desirability of establishing a national theatre due to its high expenses and restriction to a large common folks of the city. Therefore, he started a jatra company in 1862 along with a group of artists[36] which produced Michael's *Sharmistha* (1858-1859)—first modern drama written by first Bengali dramatist in blank verse in English style—acts and scenes, as a jatra without the help of a stage or scenery (Mukherjee 1982:27). The problem with staging the modern drama in jatra style was the absence of songs suitable for the jatra performance. Ghosh was denied by a composer[37] for the songs, which led him to compose the songs for Sharmistha, who was already exposed to eighteenth century English poetry. The staging of modern drama in jatra style finally was successful. He later built his own permanent public theater and continued to stage Bengali dramas. Sudipto Chatterjee's (2007:120) archival study on colonial jatra opens up the controversies in the public sphere (Calcutta Review and Somprakash) which emerged after the staging of Ghosh's Sharmitha in jatra style. A typical jatra performance is despised by the British and puritanic babus and the popularity among the lower class in Calcutta made it impossible for jatra to be acceptable to the 'first modernists of Bengal.' Somprakash's journal claimed that this attempt of such jatra is a 'perversion of the ideal of the ancient type.' Chatterjee puts it rightly, that unlike the orientalists, 'the nineteenth century European aesthetic models decreed expressions of popular culture as degenerate and licentious as it didn't fit in with the emerging definition of high Hindu culture that the native literati begun to pride itself' (*Ibid*). Chatterjee also quotes Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay who looked down upon jatra saying jatras 'had become incapable of comprehending any other class of conception'(*ibid*).

Ghoshe's attempt to produce the hybridized jatra on a public theater avenue has also attracted different opinion

like of Utpal Dutt's (1992:11-12) who saw merit in mastering acting techniques in theater by fusing theater and jatra. Chatterjee furthers remarks, based upon Ghoshe's report in Nabaprabandha in 1867, that

> '...It was a combination of frustration with the amateur quality of Bengali theater on the one hand and a desire to connect with a larger audience on the other. At the same time there must have been the wish to escape the control of the whimsical babus, whose sprawling mansions had no place for the rif-raff of the black quarters who went to see Jatra performances, that made Ghosh and his band attempt a professional outfit. The folk Jatra had evolved apace with the tides of popular taste, not stopping to care for high and low art, bhadralok or babu class' (*Ibid*:125).

Girish Ghosh[38] wrote extensively on new hybrid aesthetics in Bengali theater, under a pseudo name called Shree Pu? —later he championed experiments with cultural hybridity. He was a believer of representing his art to both the marginalized lower class of British Calcutta as well as combining his occidental orientation to theatre and its 'collaborator babus.' The jatra artists remained as the nucleus of his Baghbazar amateur company, but not active in jatra productions. Their remarks[39] to Ghosh that 'it was easier to achieve fame on a modern stage than through the Yatra' was a challenge. Ghosh directed, composed 26 songs and produced a jatra play—Usha-Haran of Mani Lal Sarkar. (Guha Thakurta 1930:100). Girish Chandra couldn't be bereft from adopting the typical farcical episodes style in his modern drama from jatras. For instance, he made frequent use of the farcical scenes, generally called 'San,' which were introduced at intervals even in serious play like *Prahlad Charit*.

Amrita Lal Basu, the actor and a known playwright like Ghosh, also saw merit in the 'hybrid negotiations of the Bengali public theater.' Chatterjee translates Basu's differences between jatra and Western theatre in the following way:

> 'In our native Jatra, songs are the main thing, which is why you 'listen' to a Jatra play; to a Jatra play; but in theater it is physical action, that is , 'acting', which is why theater is to be seen… It is through its songs that Jatra 'expresses' itself; cut the songs and everything remains untold. But theatre has cut songs to size, [because] acting is natural characteristic of drama.' (Ray Choudhury 1972:22 as cited and translated by Chatterjee 2007:139)

Such distinctions helped to understand the independent stand and the 'potential to interface with each other' as a need of the general audience. The experiments with hybrid theater or democratization of theater led Ghosh, the significant production of Nildarpan in 1872, to National Theater. It not only sold its tickets at a very low prices, but the most 'most important reason for their success was the incorporation of a few elements of jatra into theatre and a healthy competition developed at this time between jatra and modern theater.' This resulted in an improvement in the quality of jatra as there was competition between jatra and theater for 'newer and novel' expression (*Ibid*:144).

The printing of 'low/cheap literature or pulp literature called Battala dramas[40] at the advent of the printing press in the nineteenth century, also stood as a challenge to public theater and other 'highbrow literature' in Bengal. Apart from borrowing the style and imbibing the musicality and histrionic acting style to attract a larger audience for cheap tickets, the public theatres did not particularly promote jatra. However this high and low created a hybrid class of audience, although Battala dramas did not get a space in public theaters. Chatterjee has drawn a diagram to demonstrate the complex relationship between high and low drama (Battala dramas and jatras) and the relationship between its audience and performance (*Ibid*: 146). The hybridzed jatra and battala dramas as well as exclusive high drama have similar subjects matters and its audiences—babus and a small section of middle class audiences only, who related to high drama, whereas large section of lower class and middle

class audience related to only to low drama. All these three main classes of audience-created the performance while overlapping with both babu as well as lower class, whereas middle class signified the brokerage that often performed between high and low. The performances of both public theatre and jatra and other folk forms generally do not directly intersect but have an influx of influences and there is some interactions between them.

Mythological plays were performed as a consequence of DPA of 1876, with unfailing eternal appeal to Bengali mind and heart by the modern dramatist. From 1880s onwards, combining sentiments of heroism, devotion, love with a mixture of tears and smiles brought large audiences and the theatre became a source of entertainment for the whole family.[41] Happy ending was in consonance with the typical Bengali bent of mind (Mukherjee 1982:52). Public theatres became a centre for religious teachings and preaching, knowledge and enlightenment, the moral and spiritual welfare of the common man.[42] However, Ghosh's attempts at producing mythological dramas was also not bereft of criticism as Chatterjee argues that 'Hindu religion itself, which was the object of ridicule with a certain highbrow section of the community, seemed to win the battle against its detractors' (*ibid*:152). Devotional Bengali dramas have also faced criticism due to their song fullness like jatra. One private theater, exceptional in its cultivation and practice of all sorts of artistic activities, was Jorasanko Theatre at Rabindranath Tagore's ancestral residence, built at the initiative of Jyotidranath and Gunedranath and Sarada Prasad Ganguli since their grandfather's time.[43]

Apart from the crisscross relation and interaction of jatra and modern drama whether it is Sanskrit performance texts, devotional or social issues, jatrawalas were quick to translate them into their style. For instance, first ever original Bengali Drama performance of Ramnarayan Tarakratna's *Kulina Kula Sarvasv.a*[44] Although this drama was not so close in its performing style to that of English theaters. However, this

pioneering play as Guha-Thakurta comments 'marked a departure for the first time from all the artificial expository devices of the Yatra, its set types of character and all the usual tricks which are the stock-in-trade of the Yatrawalas ... make a serious attempt at holding "the mirror upto nature" without having recourse to the extra-human and super natural devices of some of the Yatras, and thereby giving a picture of real life and real events' (1930:58). The marginalization of folk culture in Calcutta by the end of nineteenth century as Banerjee (1989:2) summarizes was due to 'A combination of various factors—changes in the taste of the western educated gentry, a new set of moral values learnt from the mid-Victorian English mentors, the inability of the folk artists to compete with a superior media technology, regulation and repression by the state, an ideological campaign by the indigenous elite...the hierarchical features of the indigenous traditional culture separating courtly culture from folk culture; the esoteric from popular religious movements ... the occupational division of labour gave birth to two separate streams of culture' (*Ibid*:6). Pabitra Sarkar explains that with the establishment of the public stage in Calcutta in 1872, jatra entered a new, lusterless era. It started assimilating ideas of plot construction, characterization, etc. from the popular plays of the time, most of which followed European models. Some earlier playwrights of the public stage borrowed liberally from jatra, but later it was jatra which remained at the receiving end. It imitated the themes, the situations, the character-types, the styles of dialogue even the tunes and wording of the songs from those of successful stage plays, and unabashedly presented them to an eager non-citified audience. So before the public theatre was finally in, jatra fell out of favor with the educated city audience. Several writers around the middle of the last century bitterly complained about the banality, coarseness and vulgarity that jatra has fallen prey to, and were eager for a change. Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873) laments the degeneration of tastes that the Bengali audience

demonstrates in its choice of theatrical entertainment, i.e. jatra. Therefore, the establishment of public stage and production of Western-type plays ushered in a change of taste which was long overdue and jatra was almost banished from Calcutta.

The hybridized jatra in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was critiqued due to its monotony of themes, the preponderance of music over action, the scurrility and obscenity of the comic interludes, the colloquial dialogues mixed with pidgin Bengali and rural Bengali dialects and ungrammatical Hindi. This hindered jatra from developing into a 'truly national Bengali drama' (Thakurta 1930:30). The reason is the emergence of something more modern, an intellectual re-birth, overwhelming Western literature and drama that captured the popular imagination and 'become a suitable instrument for pleasure and education' (*Ibid*: 40). However, Guha Thakurta was optimistic about its resilience in the centuries to come.

Bhakti, which had been a prerequisite for disseminating Vaishnava philosophy among the common mass had a decline with the commencement of modern Bengali jatra. In other words, pauranic jatra transformed to 'Jatra of one's fancy/hobby' as Monowar Hussain (2011:17) puts it —'Shokher jatra' was supposed to be vulgar or concerned with the more immediate earthly matters as against the matters of divine'(Saha:2018:159). The late nineteenth century witnessed a hybrid of entertainment, devotion, historical, amorous with a spark of revolutionary themes in new jatra performances.

Indian Nationalism and Swadeshi Jatra: A 20th Century Revival

Popular folk performances negotiated with another hybrid within the context of two political developments of the century —presence of a fully developed public sphere and the outbreak of swadeshi and Bengal boycott agitation

in response to the partition in Bengal. Since the late nineteenth century as Mimasha Pandit (2015:11) describes it, socioeconomic issues and political issues featured in jatra farces, based on scandalous events like the *Elokeshi-Mahantal*.[45] Under such circumstances, intellectuals began to look towards the past and towards folk traditions and culture to counter the colonial discourses. Theatre, jatra and songs of the swadeshi age emerged as means used by the intelligentsia to bridge the gap existing between the educated and the un-lettered masses of Bengal' (*Ibid*). Rare collection of some printed jatrapala texts by Devajit Bandyopadhyayl[46] also prove performances of Kshaṇādebī, a play on the life of the legendary woman astrologer Khana and Palliseba, a play on social and political issues like women's literacy & freedom struggle & religious tolerance and gender equality in Bengal sometime around late nineteenth century.

The accommodative nature of jatra, from Vaishnava period to colonial jatras, has tremendous possibilities to be used as a tool for social change. Very interestingly, because of its indigeneity and association with religiosity, jatra was out of the purview of DPA until 1910 and nationalists appropriated it for a forum of national consciousness. Apart from the protests from a section of Indian opinion[47] which was against the DPA bill as it was recorded on 16 December 1876 in the section number 12 that prescribes 'Exclusion of performance at religious festivals. - Nothing in this Act applies to any jatras or performances of a like kind at religious festivals.'[48] However, this exclusion did not entirely exterminate the confusion over distinguishing the dramatic genre, the British officer. For instance, as Saha quotes Basudeb Chattopadhyay (2008)[49]:

...much later in the beginning of twentieth century-but what is *jatra*? The question was asked by L. F. Morshead, Inspector of general of Police, Lower Provinces of his Indian subordinates in a letter dated 15 September 1910. He asked, 'Can you tell me precisely what a Jatra is? The question has arisen…, as to whether steps should be taken to prevent

them spreading a sedition, but I find myself hampered In considering it for want of a clear definition...his subordinates clarified, 'Jatra is an informal dramatic performances, usually harmless, without any scenes or stages. These jatras usually held on occasions of pujas (Hindu religious ceremonies) in the quadrangles of gentlemen residence for amusements of guests. Also held in the open air, when section of Bazar people in Calcutta and elsewhere celebrate their Barwaris or common pujas.' The subjects are usually religious or mythological The jatrawallas, who are usually very poor people, sometimes introduce comical farce, usually at the end of the *jatra*, to amuse chiefly children and the youth, the subjects being quarrels between two ghosts or between co-wives, or between two drunken people etc.'(*Ibid*:160)

This definition of jatra was not as innocent as the real manifestation of jatra during this historic period in Bengal. The Vaishnavite/mythological jatra, also known as Gitinatya or Gitabhinaya, was also being used as an effective communicative agent for nuanced national consciousness during Swadeshi movement in Bengal. Such jatras are called Swadeshi jatra. Mimasha Pandit, (2015) in her recent dissertation work on Swadeshi jatra, (1905-1912) has explored the 'balancing act' of jatra as a traditional genre as well as being an effective communicative agent and 'an arena of conducting politics' (Pandit:2015:25). Joggeshwar Dey,[50] popularly known as Mukunda Das pioneered Swadeshi jatra palas in 1906. Influenced by nationalist Aswini Kumar Dutta, Mukunda Das converted from being an alcoholic, shopkeeper to a Vaishnavite to a Goddess Kali devotee and later a Kirtaniya, who introduced revolutionary portrayal of characters and themes. The idea was to reach out to the common public, to project swadeshi ideology and therefore, its immediate reception in folk cultural practices like, Jarigan, Kathakatha and jatra was chosen to be the most popular way. The proliferation of jatra parties as an effect of the strict vigilance regarding 'theatre performances' although many printed Swadeshi jatra texts

of Das were banned (*Ibid*). The growth of jatra parties ingrained sociopolitical issues, for instance Motilal Roy's Nabadwip Banga Geetabhinoy Sampradaya and Gagan Chandra Sutradhar's jatra party in Calcutta were also active in legitimating political ideas through Swadeshi jatras in both sides of Bengal (Saha:2018:169). This inter mixture of jatra texts and performance as Pandit argues 'bring together the highbrow Sanskritic moral order and popular culture with the middle class theatre going and jatra listening audience acting as a catalyst between the two.' Chatterjee points out that the cultural hybridity resulted in balancing several things together—taste of the public, the taste of jatra darshak and the task of invoking the emotion of the audience/public in favor of the ideas of the age and in favor of imagined bond that assumed the form of a nation.' The performance texts thus, turned out to be a catalyst in the public sphere.

Swadeshi Text in Performance Context

The first popular jatra pala that drew the attention of British officials, was Matripuja written and produced by Mukunda Das and also by Gagan Chandra. The play is about Bhagbati who assumed the form of Kali and Chandika and remains the mother of all: the weak and currupt. To free the heaven/Devlok from the oppression of the asuras Bhagabati assumed the form of a slayer and protector.(Pandit:2015:27).

In other plays as discussed like Surath Uddhar Gitab hinay that describes the mother figure named Angarajlakshmi, where she is dominated under the rule of foreigners. Thus, she lamented:

Buker byatha chepe koto ar rakhiba,
Mlechhader sashane koto ar kadibo
Nai ki re suputra kore je paritran...

[Though being the mother of brave children how much more will endure,

> How long will I have to suppress the pain in my heart,
> How long will I cry under the rule of the mlechhas
> Are there no able son of the mother who can rescue her…
> (*Ibid*)

The idea of violence became the crux of most of the Swadeshi jatra performances. When king Surath roamed about the wilderness, after being banished from his kingdom, Devi Mahamaya appeared before him and prophesied a way for ameliorating his condition. She recommended worship of the Mother, the Primordial Force, for amending the situation in which Surath was placed.

The feeling of nationhood that was fostered arose from the symbolic representation of the divine mother Adya Shakti, janani, kulalakshmi, and the earthly genetrix had immense cultural significance. The audiences identified in these archetypes the physical embodiment of the divine primeval force in the earthly genetrix of the kula/family. The ancient Hindu practice of sacrifice to satisfy the Mother was used as a means to refer to the acts of defiance, radical conducts, and revolutionary activities that were in vogue during the age. The jatra pala highlighted violence in the form of self-sacrifice that called for surrendering one's life and needs for a greater cause, in this pala established a relation between the worship of the primordial force and the worship of the motherland. Swadesh seva or serving one's land was portrayed coterminous with the worship of the Adya Shakti, i.e. with violence or self-sacrifice. Violence attained a new format in the performances of the Swadeshi jatra. The metaphors under such circumstances played dual role, suggesting the connection between the dramatic situation and the contemporary events, and persuading the public mind to accept the necessity of violence in freeing the mother shakti land, which engendered not merely a bond of nationhood but also affected the audience's imagination of a nation (*Ibid*).

The jatra, as performed in various places, was reported to the British commissioner, Magistrates and Superintendents

of Police as being an effective means of promoting seditious feelings. Similar notes in the records projects the objection to play Danabdalan. It is clarified in the notes that the 'story shows that throughout there are references to Hindu mythological elements transposed to current nationalitsic concerns...as the names of political figures like Surendranath Banerjee, Ashwini kuamr Dutta and the latter is portrayed as a physician in the heaven in the pala.' Similarly, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's nationalist song Vande mataram was made popular through these Swadeshi jatras. There are also instances of ridicule of the government and one that caricature the resignation of Sir Bampfylde Fuller. Despite getting many orders, Mukunda Das escaped each time from police and the government was vigilant[51] as the proliferation of jatra groups in Bengal was at a rise. Pandit concludes that these performances though lacked sophistication in their aesthetics ... created for a space for the people belonging to the lower sections of society and for the women, to talk about various ideas of nation, and to express their opinion about it. Providing avenue for expression…of performance affected the audience-public sensationally. It gave the viewer/listener public a chance to stand in a space that lay in-between two temporal planes. The two times coming together in this middle space not just made ideas comprehensible, it opened up a space where the new ideas could enact a transition. It lay between, a stage of ordinary and extraordinary life. Jatra...dissolved. Instead, a more powerful plane was brought into existence, one that was free of the prying surveillance of the Raj and the ever-assertive hold of the ideas of the nationalist leader…. Under such circumstances, the liminal stage, or the middle space, created by the Swadeshi jatra performances, not just stood aside from the Ruling Order but also had the potential to re-interpret it. warfare as a transition from the colonial paradigm, better described by the jatra performances as paradhinata, to a new, desired stage, of freedom, glorified as swadhinata.(*Ibid*:27-37).

They used it as a performative element in ways that surpassed its traditional role. Swadeshi performances transformed the space of folk entertainments into an area of meeting, seeing, understanding, discussing, and, finally, responding. (*Ibid*:2015:2). Saha argues that the question of jatra performance was difficult to define for the British, which addresses questions of 'private/public, religious/ secular, entertainment/ ritual'. The issues of modernity and heterogeneous identity are also derived. However, arguments do not substantiate these issues in her study.

Jatra as a cultural performance got associated with religious festivals and ceremonies. It continued to be crude and undeveloped aspect of drama for almost 600 centuries. However, as most of the historians of Bengali literature and culture would agree, it contained the germs of a regular drama within itself. Susheel De (1962:402-411) contends that without getting into any competition with any other folk/modern genres, 'addressing a different audience, using different tools, methods (preponderance of operatic and melodramatc elements), it had its indigenous form of regular drama. ' Its peculiar mode of singing of Chaupadis, Mahajana-padas and Tukko for entrancing audience has been extremely popular, which perfectly contributed its lyric and religious tendencies. By late eighteenth century, professional jatra parties flourished but all the jatrawalas are not known except some popular ones. The degeneration around 1870s was as synchronous with and was therefore affected by the change of taste and literary fashion. The nineteenth century experienced Western modernity which resulted in modern Bengali literature and culture. Thereby a sharp cultural distinction was created in Calcutta between a Western educated gentry and 'lower class common people.' This distinction is reflected in the nineteenth century writings as pointed out by Gautam Bhadra (2006)[52] in newspaper, journals as well as in twentieth century academic writings like Sumanta Banerjee's Parlour and street (1989). While questioning the litterateur and academics on the discourse

of literary writings as a 'bricolage,' Chaudhury analyses that 'is thus shown not as seamless and internally consistent, but rather as suffering from various possibilities to fashion new syntheses from constituent elements of this discourse'.

Jatra in the early twentieth century was going through a historical transition, and when it got transformed, theatre was sidelined. From its derogatory and dejected identity in the nineteenth century for being 'cheap and amorous and imitative,' the era of Swadeshi jatra established itself once again for its fundamental concern of instructive and political. After the 1920s, jatra went through major changes, the most important being its institutional settlement in the metropolis (Lal:2004:172). From the 1930s Marxist cultural criticism began to lay stress on the representation of the working class in cultural production. Some attempts were made in the 1940s by the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA)—a cultural organization influenced by the Marxist cultural theory—to collect folk songs (jatra songs and props) from villages, though urbanized, to meet the demands of an immediate political situation or to make them acceptable to the city's middle class audience. IPTA directors revived the folk tradition of jatra, they learned to cut the performances from many hours to a three-hour show and tone down the overwhelming presence of songs and dances that constituted the original jatra performances.(Lisa Lowe et al. 1997:433). During World War II IPTA staged protest against German invasion to Russia in support of communist. Then Shambhu Mitra and Utpal Dutta continued this tradition through Bohurupee Company in the post-independent India[53].

However, folk jatra got its theatrical due because of its intermixture with modern drama and other mutations of themes continued to be performed in rural Bengal. Therefore, colonial modernists despised the folk/indigenous culture of the marginalized class of urban and rural literature and constructed the representation of medieval poetry as vulgar and obscene and one that does not cater to the modern mind. On the one hand, Modern Bengali theater celebrates its

achievement from the birth of Micheal Madhusudan Dutt's writing and on the other, their contemptuous attitude over the continuity of cultural representation of Bharat Chandra and Iswar Gupta's writings through their followers.

The discussion on the adaptation of eighteenth century dramatic literature poem Vidyasundar of Bharatchandra into jatra in the early nineteenth century unfolds the debates of modernities- sourced from foreign as well as regional indigenous materials. Choudhury in her essay counteracted and reexamined the two contiguous traditions, not through the singularity of Bengali/Indian modernity in the nineteenthg century, through a reading of Bharatchandra:

> Pramatha Chaudhuri's reappraisal of Bharatchandra for what he calls the 'modern mind' reclaims the figure of Bharatchandra as a significant icon in the quest for modernity that was germane to the creation of a secular literary space for Bengal. Such a reading creates a changed signification in the already available practices of reading, creating, instead of a binary understanding of good and bad, moral and immoral, foreign and traditional, a realization that the production of India's many modernities involved various members of a historical situation acting together and upon each other in unexpected ways. (2009:332)

Further she clarifies, such polyvalent approach can free us from the singular interpretation of modernity is an import to be associated with British imperialism A cross-sectional reading of such indigenous literature of Bengal becomes significant for the self-created identity of India's multiple modernities. To conclude, evolution of Bengali jatra can be understood from its experiencing multiple and parallel modernities and how those multiple modernities work simultaneously. Firstly, the indigenous modernities or alternative modernities, are local in nature. They primarily adapted the performative elements either from Sanskrit or non-Western modern practices. While having different colouring, they are contemporaneous and appropriation of margi and desi or high and low-brow. Second, the colonial

modernity where in the nineteenth century experienced Westernisation which resulted in a sharp cultural distinction created in Calcutta and finally a synthesis of two modernities (Bengali and colonial) which can be called hybrid modernity. It is through a negotiation of different hybridities, as delineated by Partha Chaterjee in his article Our Modernity (1997), towards the middle of the nineteenth century when the Bengali language and its idiom were being adjusted to modern literary forms in accordance with the new tastes of the urban reading public. An adjustment of jatra with multiple modernities has reshaped in every historical junctures. To continue to be a culture of resilience since its evolution, it is inevitable for the popular folk theatre form to adapt, reinvent and thus to be interpreted from their continuous improvised performance tradition. Within this context of culture of continuity and change how jatra survived as an important form of cultural expression in modern-day Bangaladesh and West Bengal in independent India is the thrust of the next chapter.

Notes

1. Maharaja Krishnachandra of Nadia who conferred on him the title of Gunakar ('Mine of virtues').
2. In Praise of Annada, (Annadamangal) Vol. 1 : A Book Review by Chhanda Chattopadhyay Bewtra by Bharatchandra Ray; Translated by France Bhattacharya; Murty Classical Library of India; Harvard University Press, New York; 2017 <www.parabaas.com/translation/database/reviews/brChhanda_Annadamangal.html>
3. 24 Bharat Chandra 'Roygunakar' - First People's Poet of Bengal | Posted Date: 08.05.2010 | Author: Souvik Dhar <www.bengalspider.com/resources/3201-Bharat-Chandra-Roygunakar-First-People-s-Poet.aspx>
4. Mangalkavya (literally, poems of well-being) a genre of Bangla narrative poems written approximately between the 15th-18th centuries, depicting the greatness of popular, indigenous deities as well as the social scenario. The poems are known as

mabgalkavya because it was believed that listening to these poems about the deities brought both spiritual and material benefits. The poems used to be rendered as musical plays but with more emphasis on the story than on the music. http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Mangalkavya

5. Kashi Khanda Upapurana,[Gupta, Dr. Kshetra (2001). Bangla Sahityer Sampurna Itihas [The Complete History of Bengali Literature] (in Bengali). Kolkata: Granthanilay. pp. 182–87.] Markandeya Purana, Bhagavat Purana,Chaurapanchashika by ilhana,KshitishvangshavaliCharitam[Bandyopadhyay, Asit Kumar (2001) [1966]. Bangla Shityer Itibritta [History of Bengali Literature] (in Bengali). III-B (3rd ed.). Kolkata: Modern Book Agency.Private Ltdpp. 147–206.]
6. Some of its older manuscripts are now preserved in British Museum, London, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Asiatic Society, Kolkata and Vangiya Sahitya Parishad, Kolkata.'
7. Goswami, Dr. Madan Mohan. ed. (1961) Bharatchandra [A Selection of Bharatchandra's Works] (in Bengali) (3rd ed.). New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.
8. Unlike Bharatchandra, he did not accept the appointment of court poet of the king. See a detailed account of his rejection of kings offer in Sumanta Banerjee, Opcit:8043.
9. Sudama Adhikari, Lochan Adhikari, Gobinda Adhikari of Krishnanagar, Pitambar Adhikari, Kalchand Pal of Dacca in Krishna jatra and other stories where as Premchand Adhikari, Ananda Adhikari and Jayachandra Adhikari excelled in Ram Jatra. (De: 1919:451).
10. Banerjee, Opcit. p.10644.
11. The first prose work in Bengalis is inspired from Christianity. They are Manuel de Assumpco, a Portuguise and Dom Antonio, a native Christian in 1743 (Das: 1961:71).
12. It is generally consists of both men and women, divided into two groups and each singing in chorus. The leaders extemporized the words of the songs, which were accompanied by musicians playing. See, the elaborate chapter on Kabigan in S.K.De (1919:302-386).
13. This musical genre is more popular among upper classes due to its melodious variations of a single theme, usually of a very trifling and erotic nature. Ram Nidhi Gupta or Nidhubabu is

the earliest known Tappa writers. Being critic to devotional songs, 'Tappa introduced a lot of sentimental rubbish and sensuality into Bengali literature' (Guha Thakurta:1930:26).

14. This genre is borrowed from popular folk tales, Bhagavata and epics and narrated by kathaks (story tellers). Narration is heightened by songs, interspersed, passages are highly ornate and sankritised Bengali and the narrators are accomplished singers. (Ibid:25).
15. Srinath Sen of rich Bengali Gurucharan sen, Ramchand Mukhopadhya, dewan of Chhatu babu, swarup Dutta. (cited from Banerjee, Opcit. p.107).
16. Source: Prasun Choudhury.
17. A classical singer has the largest collection of Jatra songs of three hundred centuries as his private collection. Recently his collections are digitised and archived in the British Library under the Endangered Archives Program.
18. As quoted from Durgadas Lahiri, p. 360 Bangalir gan (in Bengali), Calcutta 1312 Bengali Year approx. 1905.
19. A very familiar character in 19th century Calcutta society in the minds of audience, where the rich babus-as well as their wives/depended on these women for 'arrangement'' of their extra-martial affairs.
20. See Banerjee, Opcit, p.107.
21. Bharatchandra Ray, Banglapedia, http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Bharatchandra_Ray51.
22. Journal of Bengali Studies (5)1, 2016, Summer, May: 145-164
23. See Gaiurishankar Bhattacharya, bangla Lokantya sameeksha (in Bengali), calcutta 1972, pp/ 66-7 as cited in Banerjee 1989:104.
24. Ten or twelve young boys are entrusted to singing in Jatra who are trained at an early age for an 'indispensable' 'strong, high soprano voice'. They don't act directly in the play but 'dressed in shepherd boys, sometime in young maidens, and quite frequently as court singers, they express in song the feelings intended to be aroused in the audience by such incidents as death, victory and fulfilled or unfulfilled love'. Divided in two to three with a leader or called master singer, each group faces the audience at one of the four sides of the square-shaped Rangabhumi (stage), singing the same song in chorus. (Guha Thakurta: 1930:24).

25. In the Jatras of Raya Ramananda, a contemporary of Vaishnavite preacher of Chaitanya Subir Roy Choudhury, Bilati Jatra theke Swadeshi Theatre 1972, pp.2-3.
26. Guha Thakurta observes, in modern times, the conopies, tapaestries, beautiful chandeliers and canvas paintings have begun to replace the old articles of decoration. If a performance happens to take place on the premises of a very rich man, the spectators may be treated from time to time to sprays of rose water from gold or silver syringes (20).
27. A Bengali literary magazine, started by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in 1872, that had been a mirror of Bengali intellectuals of 19th and 20th century Kolkata.
28. These rituals are strict aesthetic codes of Natyasashtra. Prastabana is a hymn in honor of the deity to be presided before the play begins, Bandana is a chant and Nandi is a salutation song, Purbaranga is the introduction and Sutradhar the director.
29. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Michael-Madhusudan-Datta#ref4288
30. Sisir das notes that two plays Kirtibilas and Krsna Kumari (1861) deviated from Sanskrit dramaturgy, were tragic. This has been a prejudice against staging a tragedy (1961:120).
31. Mukherjee, Sushil, 1982, The Story of the Calcutta Theatres:1753-1980.
32. Like first class Rs 1, second class Anna 8.
33. The first Public theater is National Theater 1872-73, The Calcutta National Theatrircal Society, Hindu National Theater (1873), Great National Theater(1874-77), Oriental Theatre, Bengal Theater and Star Theater.
34. Like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Girish Chandra Ghosh, Vidyabinod and Manmohan Goswami.
35. They caricatured of Jagadananda Mukherjee-pro British officers.
36. Like Nagendranath Banerjee, Girish chandra Ghosh, Radha Madhab kar and Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi.
37. Priya Nath Mallik, a well known musical composer. He refused, 'remarking that the young enthusiasts could never succeed'(Guha Thakurta:1930:96).
38. For a detailed life sketch and his social and family influences upon theatre, see Sudipto Chatterjee (2007: 133-171).

39. Amarendra Nath Dutta, Abhinetr-Kahini, pp.18-19. (Guha Thakurta: 1930-100).
40. See Chatterjees elaborate discussion on Battala literature (144-5).
41. Plays like Abhimanyu Badha, Seetar Bhibbaha and Ramer Banbas.
42. Chaitanya Leela of Girish Ghosh was a major contribution that created a great sensation. Ramkrishna Paramhansha too watched this performance in the theater and moved by the performance and became the patron saint of the Bengali public theater.
43. Dwarkanath Tagore bought the Chowringhi Theatre (1831) for 30,000 rupees in 1835 due to its financial difficulties (Mukherjee, 1982:.4).
44. Tarakratna's *Kulina kula sarvasva* ('caste is everything to a High caste Brahmin') in the first week of March 1857/1856 ... departure from the practice of staging mythological plays. As a social content- the system of kulin marriage, which sanctioned polygamy for a Hindu Brahmin of the chosen class. First time being a part of social reform under the impact of English education against Brahmins, this play served the purpose. (Mukherjee 1982:18).
45. See Anshika Jain 2019 Elokeshi Murder: A Scandal That Shook Colonial Calcutta, March 9.
46. Endangered Archives Programme, https://eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP261-1-2-31.
47. Raja Narendra Krishna suggested as recorded in Legistlative Council Proceeding that jatra, not only on religious occasions but on other occasions as well be excluded from the purview of the bill. (as cited in Saha:2018:159).
48. The Dramatic Performances Act, 1876 (XIX of 1876) [16th December, 1876].
49. Folk Theatre and Raj: Selection from Confidential records, Introduction, West Bengal State Archives, Higher Education department, Government of West Bengal, 2008, iv-v.
50. For an interesting life account of Mukunda Das, see, Saha, 2018:166-167.
51. See the details in Saha (174-175) of the Lieutenant-governor Governor's orders regarding the jatra performnces as per the DPA 187669.

52. Cited by Roshinka Chaudhuri (2009:70).
53. <www.bengalspider.com/resources/4228-Jatra-Pala-Bengali-Folk-Theatre.aspx>

CHAPTER 4

Politics and Commerce: Jatra in Post-Independence Period

The popularity of jatra in rural Bengal grew high in the post-Independent time as the interest among elite audience revived and patronized the promising future of the form. On the other hand, the leading political party—Communist Party in particular, could also see the possibilities of using it as a tool for political movement. The coexistence of both the kinds of jatra seems an amicable journey of its continuity and also change. The post 1947 India experienced the dissemination and popularity of new mass media—Television, cinema and radio. The question is whether the modern mass media jeopardized the traditional theater or they produced another hybrid. Secondly, since the legitimate/amateur theater or group theater continued to have a ready and ever-expanding audience in Kolkata, did jatra loose it's audience? To answer these questions, in this chapter, I have mapped the changes in materiality and aesthetics of jatra from 1950s onward in Kolkata. The first section of the chapter will review the emergence of post-colonial drama/political jatra in the 1960s and in 1970s of Utpal Dutt's revolutionary jatras and experimental Shakespearan jatras in rural Bengal. The second section has also focused on the changes in aesthetics around 1980s with the introduction of new entertaining elements like Bollywood music and dance, entry of cinema and television actors in commercial jatra enterprises. The last section is on the contemporary politics of jatra in both rural and urban Bengal.

The early nineteenth century degeneration of Jatra was caused mainly by the wealthy amateurs, the progenies of the Kolkata 'Babus,' who were seekers of cheap and gross entertainment rather than men with a mission. So before the public theatre was finally in, jatra fell out of favor with the educated city audience. Therefore, the establishment of public stage and production of Western-type plays ushered in a change of taste which was long overdue and jatra was almost banished from Kolkata. However, it left its memory in the operatic stage plays which attained some popular success on the Kolkata stages during the second half of the nineteenth century, but by itself it was never accepted with much enthusiasm by the educated or elite audience. Eventually jatra became the fosterling of its only constant patron, the rural audience. This state of affairs continued for more than three-quarters of a century. With India's independence in 1947, some interest in jatra was revived among the elite audiences of Kolkata, mainly spurred by the efforts of political parties, notably the Communists, to utilize it as an ideological vehicle. But the real renaissance of jatra, in terms of the Kolkata audience, came even later, in the early sixties; (Pabitra Sarkar:1995,89). The Shovabazar palace jatra festival in 1961 has been the turning point of jatra industry post-independence.[1]

Jatra from 1950s to 1970s had a critical time. After each decline, it rose with a new face, new plays and new techniques. Samik Bandopadhyay (1973) expresses his anxiety over jatra as followed by a note from Suresh Awasthi, the secretary of Sangeet Natak Academy, regarding the revival of indigenous theatre forms before it gets degenerated and 'traditional forms will soon become poor imitations of proscenium bound theater or the commercial cinema.' jatra practitioners adapted many changes, for instance the relevance and appropriateness of historical and mythological jatra in modern time. Bandopadhayay, while appreciating the new experimental jatras of Utpal Dutt as a 'monumental style of jatra,' is critical of professional jatra

playwrights. 'Apocryphal history suits the purpose with Alexander and Rizias...not Hitler, Lenin and Marx. With the rise of communism in West Bengal, Lenin in particular appeared on the stage. The jatra playwrights and directors have shown an utterly irresponsible attitude in their handling modern history and their works in this particular area have been largely stunt, artistically poor and incompetent.' Therefore, he anticipates a fast degeneration of professional jatra and 'the finest elements of jatra will be taken over by the experimental, non-professional theatre and assimilated' (1973:11). Such criticism and a desire led few enthusiasts to create a new myth through experimental jatras with two dimensional purposes—introducing revolutionary plays as well as change in its aesthetics. The next section of this chapter is focused on experiments in jatras from late 1960s till mid 1980s.

Section 1: The Spirit of Communism: Social Criticism in Mythological, Historical & Social Palas

Prabhat Das[2] writes about Panchu Sen as one of the most powerful actors post-independence, who have been instrumental in introducing legendary jatra palakars and actors. From 1950s onward jatrapalas can be only traced through few well-known actors, directors and writers like Phanibhusan Vidyabinod, Brajendra Kumar Dey and Bhairav Ganguly. They initiated a reduction in number of songs from 100 to around 40 in a jatra pala. But more crucial is their contribution in the introduction of social criticism into their stories, if not communism in an overt way. The themes emphasise on poverty, caste reforms, illiteracy etc. For example few titles like *Dharmer Boli Samajer Boli*, a play by Dey and *Muchir Chhele* by Vidyabinod are on caste reforms. Similarly Bhairav Ganguly's *Ekti Paisa* and *Maa Mati Manush* portray the struggle and economic exploitation of the lower class.

Very significantly, Brajendra kumar Dey introduced a

novel interpretation of mythological palas that transgressed the old myth. Parajita Meghanth or Meghanath Badha (1976), as written by De where Ravan is portrayed as an ideal person. Ravana has seen Sita as Laxmi and has no desire for another woman. Leela Basaan (1933), De's play exemplifies the modernity in mythology as performed by professional jatra companies as discussed by Ratan Kumar Mandal.[3] In a pala based on *pratibad* (dialogue) with reference to Krisha's voice (*yada yada hi Dharmshya Glanir Bhabati Bharate...*) in Bhagavatgita, the characters Jara and Chandan are not from mythology but of contemporary times.. A dialogue between ordinary citizens and exploitative British officers has been portrayed. In the 2nd Act of the play. The resistance by Jara, the rebel to the Bhagavatgita can be seen in the following:

karma karo-phal chaibar adhikar nahin.
Ame sale khete marte janna janma chis heichi aar phal bhog karbe aar jaara...

This character is the most democratic and dynamic character in the jatra world and a new step in jatra. In acting style also this has been a pick. Such counter criticism in jatra as a new myth was created as a counter to the popular myth in his jatra palas. Such encounter with counter culture of performative narrative leads to another trajectory of pro-communist jatra.

The other wave of Marxist jatras and palakars in the 1960s was of Tarun Opera's (1964) Shanti Gopal Pal. He joined jatra as a profession in 1958 and brought a major shift from mythological to the roles of leaders like Vladimir Lenin, Karl Marx, Mao Tse Tung, Salvador Allende, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, Raja Rammohun Roy, Swami Vivekananda and others to 'educate the rural viewers.'

In his interview to Open magazine, he says 'People were tired of the loud roles and the same old stories. Those were the days of change, of trade and peasants' unions being formed, of communism's rise, the success of IPTA. Jatra became unacceptable to the educated and urban folk. I knew

it was time to change.' (Jaideep Mazumdar (2010)[4] 'His role as the German dictator (Hitler) ushered in a new era in jatra as he says 'That (after his first social play Ghum Bhangar Gaan) emboldened me to try something revolutionary—play Hitler on the jatra stage. People thought I was mad....' He studied photos, books and newspaper accounts of Hitler. Pal had devoted his life to the cause of rural education and empowerment with all his works having a mass appeal. His impeccable acting, unique style of dialogue delivery, versatility and understanding of the medium made him a household name in Bengal. In an interview with Sebanti Sarkar,[5] Pal, who is famously known as 'Chameleon of Bengal' as well as 'Jatra Samrat,'[6] recounts of his inspiration to play Hitler, Lenin etc.

> 'Jatra must become a source of information to the illiterate and backward communities as it was for ages. Perhaps my group theatre background (I began with Amar Ghosh's Udayachal) and my awareness of Shakespeare and the Gananatya Andolan made me realise how dated the palas were and how lethargic and amoral the jatra community was. So in 1964 — I had graduated from Rs 3 per day roles to leads at New Royal Binapani Opera — I borrowed money and launched Tarun Opera. We opened with Sambhu Bagh's Ghum Bhangar Gaan (1967), followed by Hitler, Lenin and the rest. Our aim was not party propaganda, but the desire to inform people about World War II, about dictatorship and patriotism, the conflict of cultures in Mohenjodaro.'

Shanti Gopal Pal with his communist jatras, opened many doors of other political jatras in Bengal.

Political and Non-political Jatra Performance from mid 1960s-mid 1980s

The post-independence urban theatres in India were juxtaposed with different experiments. Similarly there was an attempt at revival of folk theatre and at making categories of traditional art in India, for instance folk as it is, folk as

classical and folk integrated with colonial theatre. Particular regions have had long and active colonial resistance and European presence. for example, experiments on the basis of Marxian ideology in theatres, were the main feature in Kolkata and Bombay.[7] Vasudha Dalmia presents how such theatre represented real life vis a vis situations, history and 'even real gods.' Such middle class culture presents itself as 'foreign' to its makers. '...it was of vital importance to stress the indigenous origins of this new theatre and the classical tradition to which it declared itself heir. And if Western orientalists were most often quoted as authorities as to what constituted this classical tradition, their views were adapted by Indians to suit increasingly nationalist purposes' (Dalmia:2012)[8]. Whether it is translation or translocation of performative narratives. This was the time of reinventing the Indianness in Indian theatre all over. Modern dramatists educated in European theatre or having exposure to English and American theater started experimenting with the existing or dying traditional performing arts. Jatra in Bengal was no exception.

Before we review the experimental jatras (emphasis on Utpal Dutt's jatras) in Bengal, we need to focus on a significant event in 1971—a round table conference on 'Modern relevance of traditional theater,' conducted by Sangeet Natak Academy in Delhi. The participants were theatre luminaries—researchers, actors, playwrights, directors—across India and they were desirous of creating a theatre of roots. Erin B. Mee[9] summarizes two major accepted categories during the 'Theater of roots' movement as a symbol of a truly nationalist project when approaching postcolonial history of folk performances. One is the revival of folk and other is to '"decolonize" Indian theater by challenging the colonial construction of theater as a text-based phenomenon through a (re)turn to "indigenous" performance driven theatres.' (2008:5). Both are seemingly non-conflictual. The round table conference focused on commercialization, use of politics and social criticism,

changing aesthetics, relevance of mythology, issue of purity and validity, rural and urban audience of popular folk theatre forms like jatra, Tamasha, Yakshagana and Bhavai. Most interestingly, Jatra became a pivotal matter of discussion as presented in a paper: 'The Yatra and its Relevance' by Utpal Dutt. Bishnupriya Dutt,[10] while referring to the Sangeet Natak's round table conference in 1971, writes that In the post independent period, approaching the traditional arts 'formless' was a sacrilege and an anti-positioning to the nation's agenda.

In this section, two major experiments in post-colonial jatras are discussed. The political with Marxist orientation and the non-political specially the Shakespearean, that posed a spirit of communism from late 1960s till mid 1980s. Directors like Utpal Dutt, Sombhu Bag and Sourindra Mohan Chattopadhyay emerged as the new generation of artists, not only in the Bengali fraternity but also Indian theater. These leftists not only created a new genre of revolutionary jatra palas, but also inspired the next generations of jatra actors, playwright and directors, such as Shanti Gopal Pal, Brajendra Dey, Phanibhusan Vidyabinod and Bhairab Ganguli. Their contributions as legends of Bengali jatra will be in the next section.

The Case of Utpal Dutt's Jatra

Rupika Chakravarty in her essay mentions that 'Under the leadership of many talented artists such as Utpal Dutt, jatra adapted to the newfound obsession with the proscenium theater. Dutt brought the stories of Shakespeare to the paddy fields of rural Bengal, and in doing so adapted the dying tradition of jatra to its new surroundings.' Dutt disassociated with IPTA's 'semi-bourgeois standard' and its inability to produce revolutionary theater. He strongly believed that the political theatre could not follow its Western counterpart; rather an indigenous model, like Girish Chandra Ghosh's, would prove helpful in creating a revolutionary theater.

However, his critique to the Congress government through his plays led to his imprisonment in 1965. The political possibility of jatra had already been successfully explored by Mukunda Das during the disobedience and anti-partition movement. Dutt found the form more didactic and soon politicized jatra to reach out a vast audience. (Banerji:2012: 222-30).

Utpal Dutt's career began with English theatre in the mid 1940s[11] during his college days in Kolkata and he later founded the Kolkata Little Theater Group in 1947 and People's Little Theatre Group. This very known practitioner of Left-wing political theatre in India, has a long spanning career in Shakespearean dramas, political plays in IPTA and cultural group of Communist Party of India from 1940s to mid-1960s. Strongly committed to his communist ideology, during 1950s and 1960s as a comrade in Communist movement of Bengal he started Street corner theatre, poster play and agitprop campaigns and political dramas on the street as well as on proscenium stage based on his vast readings and exposé of Brechtian dramatics and Lenin-Stalin politics. Therefore, his style of theatre is influenced by the Epic theatre of Bertold Brecht and Piscator. Rustom Bharucha[12] (1983:57) notes that for Dutt a successful revolution is not from a stainless proletarian hero but 'to create who had to be aware of the failings of the society and his own feelings.' His political plays/drama centered around Chittagong rebellion, Naxalite movement, Royal Indian Navy mutiny. 'Dutt negotiated in these plays a middle ground between extended agit-prop outdoor poster drama and realistic play. This was the time of the Congress in the center and had much tribulations with the Left party. Therefore, performing political theater had its political consequence. Since 'the political messages were accentuated and the characters became larger than life' (Banerjee: 1993:1848), Dutt's anti-Congress, and therefore anti-government play, *Kallol (Ocean Song)*, in 1965 put him in jail under the Defense of India Rules. However, with the formation of the Left government in Bengal in 1977, the

theatre groups and practitioners had a more democratic space.

'Theatre groups now began to enjoy government support in the form of exemption from amusement tax, access to state-owned theatres, generous grants, prizes and awards. Trade unions, student and youth organizations and cultural associations affiliated to the left parties now had enough resources to offer handsome payments to the major theatre groups to perform in district towns and rural areas. Soon, West Bengal developed its own version of state-sponsored theatre – repetitious, predictable and non-threatening. The limits of activist political theatre were shown up once more'[13] (Chatterjee:2016;212).

Aparna Dharwadkar (2005)[14] in her post-independence theatre in India describes Dutt at once as an author, actor, director and founder-manager of his experimental theater group and definitely credited a distinct identity. 'The dominant political thematic of Dutt's work was a transhistorical interest in the theory and practice of rebellion and revolution, but as manager of the Minerva Theatre in Kolkata (1959–70) he developed a singular repertoire of spectacular multimedia productions that urged the spectator to "fall in love" with the experience of theatre itself (2005:64).'

One of the founders of Indian People Theater Association (cultural front of CPI) Utpal Dutt produced successful plays of revolution. However, his obsession for a bourgeois free society did not correspond with IPTA's concept of proletarian hero. Dutt was convinced that those who believed in an elitist theatre were actually cutting themselves off from the most important aspect of theatrical dialectics, from their only link with society. (Gupta: 2010:167). His curiosity over indigenous jatra since 1951 is evident as he writes that '(I) had been bowled over by its directness, even the brutality, of its impact on audience. The jatra refused to die with the incursion of capitalism into the countryside, unlike many other folk forms' (2009:169). 'Many Jatra palas which have

addressed contemporary historic/political issues like terrorism and Osama Bin Laden, Iraq war etc., are a follow up of Dutt's realization of the form for political engagements, instead of limiting it to conventional religious /mythological content' (Deb barman:191).

Fusion of Proscenium Theater with jatra in the 1960s

Dutt in almost all his writings on jatra has one concurrent theme to present. That is the absence of creation of a new myth he called proletarian myth to invite social consciousness through folk art. He wrote: 'It is a petty-bourgeois, urban, ignorant approach to folk songs which automatically assumes that in the original form it cannot capture the political struggle of our time. The fact, however is that the folklore tradition has already captured struggles of its own time as well as ours in complex manners, its apparent naivete is an artistic device concealing an intense moment of suffering in the life of the masses' (2009:166). His entry into jatra world[15] has been successful for about a decade not only as a jatra playwright, but as a producer, director and a persuader of political palas. The first professional jatra he wrote was Rifle (1968).

However, Dutt's initiation into the world of jatra was soon followed by tussles with the management and Dutt had to disassociate himself from the field. Later Dutt returned to jatra and wrote *Jallianwalabagh*. He contributed and directed around thirty palas for the professional Jatra of Chitpur. His plays were produced by professional groups like New Arya Opera, Loknatya, Ganabani, Tarun Opera etc. His own group Bibek Natya Samaj produced *Shon Re Malik*. *Neel Rakta,* directed by Gyanesh Mukhopadhyay and produced by Bharati Opera in 1970…always remained faithful to Leftist political ideology. In his jatra too, he realized the importance of the spectator. He says, 'The most important teachers of Jatra are the spectators. It is the Jatra actors who understand what the spectators want. Since they have to

stand again and again before the spectators and pass the fire-test, so they become socially aware quite quickly.' (Utpal Datta : Ek Samagrik Abalokan)….to this, Dutt says, '...the way in which politics was coming into Jatra, was a hesitant step, as if it was shy. The Jatra writers were afraid of writing clearly about politics.' (Utpal Datta : Ek Samagrik Abalokan , 246).(cited by Deb Barman:185-186). Dutt, being a radical communist ideologue, produced plays like Ajeya Vietnam, Leniner Dak, Ferari Fauj and Kallol with intense dramatic features. Quite inspired by Girish Chandra Ghosh and Mukunda Das and later with his intense appropriation of Brechtian theatre, Dutt adapts jatra as a form and remolds its content. His strong conviction was to reach the mass through 'revolutionary' palas with entertainment as an element as well. Attempting to preach nationalism to villagers, Dutt heavily relied on the structure of the jatra—its operatic conventions, melodramatic gestures, and hypnotic songs, 'all of which unfailingly captivated a rural audience' (Bharucha 1983, 90).

'Bengali babus who came to regard traditional forms of performance like the jatra as something quite below the dignity of those who were proudly seeking to acquire the colonizer's taste and culture. But gradually Indian producers became bold enough to shake off the burden of the colonial masters and freely adapt and re-model the original works. It is important to keep in mind that the kind of jatra plays Utpal Dutt and other major dramatists[16] were writing in the late 1960s, though inspired by the folk jatra were not the typical traditional ethnic folk play but were fusions of the folk jatra with more sophisticated urban drama.'(Gupta:2010 166-67). Dutt's experiment with folk dramatic form and content as well as with the political ideologues has been a land mark in Bengal's theater history. While many veteran theatre directors infuse folk theater techniques and elements into modern proscenium, Dutt brought proscenium plays as well as its style into jatras to the rural audiences. Such translocation of theatrical production may be termed

intercultural in the true sense. Dutt has had long association with multiple genres of theater such as street corner theater, proscenium theatre, Group theatre, cinema, a short stint in television and also with jatra.

Re-scripting Romeo & Juliet: A Shakespeare Jatra of Dutt (1970)

He took Shakespeare in proscenium style to the rural masses for the first time.[17] Shakespeare jatra demystified Shakespeare for the common masses, and made this folk form sensitive to more subtle social nuances (Gupta:2009:167) 'Macbeth was performed in proscenium style not in jatra style in Bengali. And being performed for ninety-seven times in the villages...to them (common people) Shakespeare was in proper jatra style—the action, the violence, the robustness charmed them (Utpal Dutt in an interview[18]100)…That's possibly because of the jatra-background of the audiences. Jatras are full of blood, thunder and high-flown prose which made jatra-goears receptive to Shakespeares plays. (Dutt in another interview[19])

Staged in the space of the jatra...not as implied by Rustom Bharucha (1983:62) and uncritically repeated by Jyotsna Singh (1996:142) and Helen Gilbert (1996: page no. missing) (an example of the circulation of unexamined evidence), by imposing the ritualistic, declamatory, and incantatory style of the jatra'...

'With no obvious interpolation, the performative village space of the jatra could reveal the jatra in Shakespeare! Utpal Dutt's Macbeth became a prime instance of the progressive use of folk Shakespeare to affect a novel and revolutionary means of communication, extending the range of audiences for Shakespeare in India to a class of people akin to that audience for whom the play was originally written. Its success was a revelation for Dutt. So inspired was he by the reception of jatra ´Macbeth that later he incorporated his in-sights into a book, Shakespearer Samaj Chetna

[Shakespeare's Social Consciousness]-a manifesto of his views on agitprop and the ise of the classics for socialist mobilisation...this experience of the jatra was put to god use by Dutt later in his career when he teamed up with professional jatra companies to write and direct for them.'[20]

Rustom Bharucha (1983)[21]103 makes a somewhat ambiguous statement, writing 'it was only by immersing Macbeth in the ritual world of jatra and by transforming Shakespeare's language into a bold, declamatory for of incantation that the Little Theatre Group could reach a Bengali working-class audience with an Elizabethan classic,' which has led many, including Jyotsna Singh (1996),[22] and Helen Gilbert,[23] to assert that Dutt's Macbeth was performed in jatra style. I have it from the authority of Shova Sen that it was not (Trivedi: 2005:170). In fact Macbeth was an experiment to make the rural Bengalis familiar with Shakespeare plays. Whether it was Macbeth in jatra or jatra in Macbeth, it can be safely said that the production was the first Shakespearean performance in post-Independence India, to be take away from elite circuits into the masses, staging 97 shows in one season (Gunawardana: 235).This led to re-creation of Shakespeare in jatra style.

Being an ardent dramatist of English theater, Dutt's experiment with proscenium theatre was obvious in rural villages to showcase Shakespeare to the illiterate mass. Tapati Gupta's (2009) elaborate essay brings out the 'radical transformation' of a Shakespeare text Romeo and Juliet. Much before producing *Romeo and Juliet*, Dutt took *Macbeth* to villages on proscenium stage to map out the curiosity among villagers106. The most authentic account of the first Shakespeare jatra titled Bhuli Nai Priya (further BNP) is from Tapati Gupta's fieldwork.[24] Gupta analyses a production of Romeo and Juliet by Utpal Dutt in the Indian jatra tradition, called *Bhuli Nai Priya* (I have not forgotten, my love). As Dutt aimed to reach the masses, he 'Indianized' the names and locations, and also added postcolonial contemporizations (Periago:183).

Bhuli Nai Priya was among the earliest attempts in post-colonial India to decolonize a Shakespeare play from the conventional proscenium and perform it in the idiom of an indigenous folk performance.[25](p.185, PhD thesis, Shodganga).[26] Koel Chatterjee argues that BNP[27] is, 'a translocated reworking of Romeo and Juliet by Utpal Dutt in the indigenous Bengali jatra style.' The recreated Romeo Juliet is not jatra but Shakespeare jatra for 'the sake of intensifying mass appeal, keeping in mind the requirements of a jatra performance and jatra audience' (Gupta:14).

Changing and unchanging aesthetics in traditional Jatra by Dutt

1. Resurrection of Vivek character to retain the didactic element of jatra. 'By reviving these roles, albeit in a limited manner, Dutt tried to reinforce the mock-trial aspect of jatra, with the vivek and juri acting as judges and the audience functioning as jury'[28] (Banerjee:2012:226).
2. Using the jatra stage along with adding a bed to the usual platform, that was used as a chair for all basic purpose of the story, and some basic lights. He is the first on to introduce ramps and platforms ...Dutt could be the first one in the world of jatra to introduce basic properties/amenities. Dutt shortened the duration of the modernized version for working people in mines, tea garden etc. He 'naturalized the action, expression, introduced racy conversation, natural intonation and restrained body language' against the style of 'melodramatic, flamboyant, repetition of emotional dialogues.' Most importantly despite these elementary changes in jatra style, 'the script had enough excitement to captivate the audience,' according to Kanaklata.
3. In case of costumes of the jatra actors, Dutt preferred Indian, gorgeous and colourful due to the need of the large space with minimum lights on the stage.
4. Instead of realistic voice, characters in BNP had 'choric moralizing voice' to continue general sentimental appeal in jatra.

5. Music instruments used in jatra since the 1950s, were retained in BNP. He discarded the concept of Juri. In order to entertain both modern and traditional audience, Dutt reduced the number of songs. Instead of European music, Dutt added the Kirtan, Baul and Hindustani classical music.
6. At the same time, Dutt did away with some of the more traditional jatra conventions like the use of female impersonators instead of female actresses (Banerjee: 226).

He trained the veteran jatra actors, 'and ultimately they discarded their mannerisms and adopted such a finesse that the jatra acquired a modernity that was not at odds with the indigenous flavour that Dutt was careful to retain.' (Gupta 168). Thus, he was able to bring in modernity in each successive period of jatra. Gupta concludes that post coloniality had its own brand of the dynamics of textuality and performance. No doubt it had immense success and would have opened a transformation in audience response to a non-political jatra.

Utpal Dutt's Political Jatra

Dutt, a radical left political ideologue, continued to profess in jatras as well. After the success of his experiment and reception of Shakespeare romantic tragic narrative, he did not look back to quit the popular form. His revolutionary theatre production for communist party did continue even in his own jatra troupe and he established the Bibek jatra Samaj in the year 1969 'with the intention to reach out with his political message among the village people' (Debbarman: 2014:185).

Bishnupriya Dutt, in her paper, analysed two plays of 1970 written and directed by Utpal Dutt for Loknatya Company. One was *Dilli Chalo* (March to Delhi) and the other *Samudrasasan* (Rule of the Sea \ Samudragupta).

Dilli Chalo (March to Delhi)

Dilli Chalo deals with Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and his Azad Hind Fauj. A play on Netaji is always a critique of the Gandhi-Nehru nexus. Netaji was committed to an all-out confrontation with Imperial powers and was probably martyred when a Japanese flight crashed in midst of World War II. Netaji was visiting the fascist powers to mobilize support against Imperial Britain in India. The play deliberately shifts the focus and the narrative on Netaji's soldiers of the Azad Hind Fauj (Free Indian army). The four men and women are Netaji's representative and they are the heroes of the play. Netaji is supposed to visit the village in North eastern India and mobilize support amongst the people and explain strategies to his guerilla army. The English commander Brenan comes to know about it and one of the soldiers is arrested. A British ambush is set for Netaji's arrival. The suspense builds up as the English officers are out in full force, while the informer is booed as a traitor by his fellow mates and all in the village. All watch in sheer helplessness, waiting for their leader to come and face British bullets. A man appears in the doorway in full military regalia. Netaji always wore his khaki trousers tucked in his boots. On the stage, with lighting devices creating shadows, the well-known uniform of Netaji becomes visible. Bullets shower on him and the man falls. The man is not Netaji, not even an actor impersonating Netaji but a British captain. The entire plan of being arrested; to divulge the details after inhuman torture only, is all stymied and the ambush that is set up is all clever war strategies to distract the English. Yet the audience screamed when the figure in full light comes in and falls.

Samudrasasan (Rule of the Sea\Samudragupta)

Samudrasasan was not apparently directly confrontational to the state. The play is placed in ancient India which is

often termed as the golden age of the Hindus (The Gupta period c 5 A.D.) A low caste woman Indrani is an inmate of the Buddhist ashram and is a repository of new science and philosophy learnings. She is arrested for her beliefs and education and publicly tortured while her master the monk Kalhan is rendered voiceless and speechless by the state. With his tongue cut off it seems that Kalhan is denying the scientific positions which is at the base of the controversy. Propagating that the world is round in effect challenges the very basis of heaven and earth and Gods in heaven who have divested the power in the Emperor. The play brought in other vital issues of the new nation's projects.

Sanyasir Tarabari (The Crusade): This play continued for three years. Debayan Deb Barman[29] analyses the narrative as being one of Dutt's revolutionary plays with 'the message of armed revolt against imperialism through his jatra pala—the saga of Sanyasi Revolt—a part of India's history of anti-imperialist struggle' (2014:184).

'It was the story of the revolt of sannyasis and fairs against British plunder. The yellow and blue soldiers of the Mughal army, disbanded by the victorious British aggressors. I tried to tell that the robes of the religious mendicants were, of course, outward trappings; the men had mostly been essentially patriotic. The story was basically in terms of the dialectical workings of the collapse of an ancient, feudal society, and the coming of the socially advanced Englishmen, represented by Captain Rennel. The conflict within the revolutionaries, the delight in butchery that Ramananda Giri displays, the famine which dehumanizes the peasants, the people turning away from their own champions, the lonely revolutionaries being burnt out of their forest hidings, the change in Rennel from an opium-smoking, tired, cultured Englishman to a savage successor of Hastings, and the revolutionary's final death in chains, totally alienated from his own people...deprived of even halo martyrdom—were all elements that built a dialectical view of patriotic war'(Dutt:2009:172).

Dutt has emphasized the untethered potential of patriotism and violent armed rebellion as well as selfless sacrifice, in the figures of Kripananda/Bhabhani Pathak and Ramananda Giri/Jagai. Dutt was amazed how easily the audience grasped the contemporary political implications of the work, while reacting to the misrule of the Warren Hastings administration. The story also has Devi Chowdhurani and Bhabani Pathak as leading characters. Bandopadhyay (1973:11) comments that through such attempts, 'the contemporary issues can also be posed explored in mythological and historical structures.' Dutt believed that this play would not have had the same effect if it had been staged in a proscenium setting; it was the timeless, mythical quality of the jatra that gave the performance its particular immediacy (Banerjee:228) This play, as Dutt admits, provided a 'myth of patriotic struggle' to an 'electrifying mass audiences' and hence inspired him to write two more successful political dramas. He further clarifies about the 'formlessness' of jatra, 'because of it has been tested and enriched by the dialectics of audience reaction, it has destroyed the boredom of vast mass audiences unreachable today except by use of the public-address system.' (2009:172). As 'a politically subversive theater of a kind' (Banerjee:229) Utpal Dutt himself writes about it in his concluding pages with an ardent hope that his jatra 'will strike a dialectical balance' and 'transcend it to create proletarian myth of revolution' (2009:172).

Jatra palas aimed at social upliftment and consciousness by addressing issues like education, anti-exploiting zamindars, nationalism, and anti-British themes, which was in vogue until 1980s, though that does not mean that such thematic jatras stopped being performed. Bengali jatra therefore, sets a trend of progressive jatra in the post independent period, along with the commercial jatras of Chitpore production houses.

Section 2: Changing Economy and Aesthetics of Jatra since Independence

The popular drama as liked by a majority of the population, jatra never really lost its appeal among its highest number of audiences as compared to other media audience. The itinerant jatra companies could reach places, where TV, cinema theaters or even city's legitimate theatre did not have access. The professional legitimate theater has had its expansion more than any other performing genres in Bengal. Jatra had to contest ultimately to re-establish its popularity. However, its success lay in its very nature of being itinerant. The troupes are highly accessible to a significantly higher audience. The professionalization of Kolkata based jatra companies in Chitpore not only adapted new elements from mass media but also survived and flourished in the region. The changing political economy of jatra in patronage, pricing, structure, gender, production, schedule of traveling, professionalization of actors and the institutionalization of jatra companies in Kolkata will be discussed in this section of the chapter. Similar changes were seen in jatra play's structure and representation. As influenced by modern Bengali dramas, jatras too began to be innovative with more prose and 'structured plots.' The operatic mythological/ devotional jatra palas did shrink and social and family stories grew. A new generation of jatrapalakars—like Bhairabh Gangopadhyay, Brajendra Kumar Dey and Phanibhusan Bidyabinod, revived the form while meeting the demands of being contemporary relevant and took it to new heights of success from the 1960s. Heavily drawn from proscenium theaters of Kolkata, the action is melodramatic and the pitch of the typical jatra actors give 'frequent flint stone sparks' to mark a difference from the usual modern dramatic realistic dialogue delivery, a newness that jatra was quick to adopt in its long enactments and keep on improvising. Changes are also seen in performance settings, acting techniques, make up, lighting and sound properties.

Professionalism

From the 1950s to the 1960s jatra had a critical time. Ensuring continuity after each decline, it rose with new faces, new plays and new techniques. Tapati Gupta (2010) terms Dutts jatra as 'urban-rural' and a re-configuring of tradition rather than an imitation. Gupta's strong belief jatra is 'Urban-Rural.' Why not rural urban? One probably has to differentiate the style of rural Bengal and urban Bengal. Rural jatra was already highly influenced by urban culture—be it music or musical instruments. As she emphasizes the changes and transformation of jatras in rural and jatras in urban, she tends to see jatra from the urban centric angle. She argues that traditional jatra is of rural Bengal and modern jatra, as had emerged in modern Kolkata, as professionalization. The beginning of maintaining a standard and practice to have a producer-client relationship happened only after the rise of professional theatre in Kolkata.

This was the period of growth of professional jatra companies in Kolkata. The emergence of professional jatra parties in urban Bengal started from early nineteenth century, and popular troupes like Adhikari parties(1820s), Gopal Ooray party(1835), Natta Company (1889) had come up, and by the 1920s there were poorer but more mobile version of the professional troupes in Kolkata operating. Some earlier playwrights of the public stage, such as Girish Chandra Ghosh (1844-1911) or Manomohan Basu (1831-1912), borrowed liberally from jatra, but later it was jatra which remained at the receiving end. It imitated the themes, the situations, the character-types, the styles of dialogue, even the tunes and wording of the songs from those of successful stage plays, and unabashedly presented them to an eager non-citified audience. (Sarkar: 1985:88) Mid-twentieth century saw a tremendous growth of professional jatra parties sprawling in famous jatrapara on the Chitpur road, now called Rabindra Sarani. It is obvious, with the construction of the city; that spaces were divided as per economic/

occupational categories. Therefore, all jatra parties opened their box like small offices along with rehearsal halls. In the 1970s, as Carol Farber locates, jatra para is the locus of jatra business deals with political economy and money and it does so profitably; a way of ensuring a livelihood for about 1500 people: actors, singers, dancers, musicians, composers, writers, directors, technicians, managers, brokers, costume centers and sales people, publishers, printers, bus owners, servants and the owners—(called Adhikaris) of jatra parties, all earn a major part of their living from their association with the professional jatra (1979:.41).

Printing companies known as libraries on jatra para publish jatra palas as well as religious texts...the business of the production of meaning through 'cultural performances'. It is a world of ledgers, payrolls, logistics, rentals, fees, advertising, incomes and disbursements, performance strategies, contracts, like any other Bengali privately owned businesses. The management of jatra party expresses concern over the expenditures and profits of the party while the actors, technicians, dancers, musicians, middle management and the support staff expresses concern over salary and wages-paid in time or paid at all.

In the late 50s, the growth of the Bengali film industry all but sounded a death knell of jatra. Then in early 1961, a jatra festival and seminar was organized in Shovabazar Rajbari, where speakers stressed on the need of remodeling. By mid 1980s, there were as many as 150 professional troupes in Kolkata alone. Sudeshna Roy, in a long article in the Telegraph from September 1989, compares the unparalleled popularity of jatra in rural Bengal with Bombay talkies. The biggest money spinner today in the world of Bengali show biz is not the Bengali film or the theatre but jatra as compared to the 60s and 70s when it was a small-time entertainment form confined mainly to villages.

The itinerant jatra companies could reach places, where TV, cinema theatres or even city's legitimate theatre did not have access. A handful business people of Kolkata,

with enterprising skills like in any other commercial groups, hired a group of paid professional actors and even maintained branch offices at places like Asansol, Siliguri and Darjleeng in Bengal. The preferred destinations of these mobile theatre companies were 'coal mine areas of West Bengal and Eastern Bihar, the tea garden areas of North Bengal and the railway establishment in lower Assam are the areas with the maximum profit potential for the jatra troupes...' (Sarkar:1995). They rush to the next destination by modern transport, no more by bullock cart. For most part of the jatra business is a lucrative one, but occasionally, due to unseasonal weather, political trouble in the countryside, wars, or anti-Bengal feelings in Assam, Bihar or Orissa, the contracts negotiated cannot be fulfilled and the business finds itself in financial straits, as observed by Carol Farber. 'Financing jatra—in which tickets range from Rs 5 to Rs 30—has never been a problem. Both Marwari and Bengali money-lenders readily provide loans though at exorbitant interest rates, ranging from 10 per cent to 26 per cent a month. But this expense is absorbed as some opera companies make profits as high as Rs 25 lakh from a single production, the reasonably successful ones running for about six months".

Salary, Season and Stars

Around the Bengali new year day contracts for leading artists are signed. The excitement in Chitpur is very close to that in football tents. The larger the sum of money offered, the bigger the star bagged. Heroines are at times hidden away to keep them safe from temptations offered by rival groups. They are provide with personal cars, given special diets and kept in the best tourist lodges available. The rest travels in buses or matador vans. Each group has its own cook and staff to look after the artist. The salaried main actors had changed from Rs. 50 in the nineteenth century to Rs. 75 in early twentieth century to Rs 10,000 by the 1970s. The average show draws a crowd of at least 10,000-15,000. In case of big

company like Natta, the crowd can swell to 40,000 to 50,000. Between 1980-1990 'For around 20,000 people with about 300 opera companies, it spells employment, and for many Bengali newspapers, it means their very survival, dependent as they are on Rs 3 crore in annual advertisements from a Rs 50-crore industry that jatra has now become' (Ref). In the early 1990s, jatra, 'poor man's entertainment' as termed by Arunava Sinha, has a mega business worth about Rs. 1 crore a year as few companies like Agragami, Lokantya and Natta company make about Rs. 1 crore a season.

The jatra season begins at Durga puja and lasts till the next monsoon. Ratha jatra is a time of their premier show in Kolkata city, not really for the Kolkata audience but for the impresarios from all over Bengal who would book the palas for the next season to come. These intermediaries or impresarios are the real patron in the post-zamindari or single rich patrons until 1950s. However, the rates per show is not fixed by the jatra parties as it ranges from Rs.25000-Rs.60,000. To quote Brajgopal Saha (1992) as interviewed by Sinha (1992) 'You know you've got a hit on your hands when you hike your rates, and they're still fighting with one another to book you first.'[30] Sinha claims it is not due to the 'punchiest of storylines but the glitziest of stars and the slickest of production values.' The stars, known as 'boxes,' form Tollygunge (Kolkata film industry) charge the highest. For instance, during the 1990s, cinema actors like Prasanjit or Chiranjeet used to be paid Rs. 15,000 per show as the highest proportion of the party's costs. Rupa Ganguly, also a Bollywood actor, seems to be paid her travel from Bombay to Kolkata for her jatra show in contrast to the professional jatra actors like Bina Dasgupta, Tapan Kumar, Swapan Kumar etc. The entry of a list of film stars like Sudha Chandran, Sulata Chowdhury, Suchitra Sen, Moon moon Sen and Rabi Ghosh definitely created a new genre of jatra in Chitpore industry. There are actors who started acting in jatra circuit and later joined cinema. For instance, Chhabi Biswas, Ahindra Chowdry and Jahar Ganguly (Mullick).[31]

Therefore, the Chitpore productions offer a variety of business models inclusive of the current popular stars and also ex-stars of film industry. According to Dasgupta's report in 1987, the industry has overtaken Bengali films in terms of the number of productions, audience response and income. For instance, last year (1986) there were about 300 jatra productions as compared to 30 Bengali films. Jatra audiences at about 12 crore were treble that of cinema audiences.

The script writers or palakars as they are popularly known, have a market too. Newspapers 'guesstimate' the price of of highly demanded Bhairab Gangopadhyay and Brajendra Kumar De who could write three to four scripts for different parties as per their requirements of stories. The charges as popular belief, Gangopadhyay demands upto Rs 1 lakh.

The marketing strategy goes so far even in the absence of a top script. For instance, introducing live animal on stage, new role models like Sadam Hussain, Safadar Hashmi, Rajiv Gandhi and technical innovation like 'cyclorama' would guarantee bigger returns[32].

Filmy Jatra

Both themes and technical advancements on stage became complementary as soon as a few jatra proprietors induced cinematic elements. The very stereotypical themes of jatras varied from 'sentimentality and family conflicts—preferbaly with a few fallen women, a morally degenerate businessman and tortured mother with a heart of gold thrown in' (Sinha 1992) Mohan Chatterji, an actor and proprietor of Mohan Opera feels that it is taking the place of Bengali cinema 'which has been unable to provide action, speed or entertainment to audiences who are craving for it.' "Theatre in the city is still experimenting with Brecht, Shakespeare and Kurosawa. It is too high-flown for the common people to understand. People require entertainment, not intellectual stimulation.'

an audience said. If opera companies are quick to change their themes to meet the current public mood, it is because productions can be put up within a month—a flexibility unavailable to either film or theatre. For example, Phoolan Devi's rise to fame was followed almost immediately by a production of the same name with astounding success. And the President—prime minister tussle is now being depicted through a classical theme in which Lord Shiva represents the President and the witty Narayan the prime minister. The tensions between mother-son relationships after the entry of daughter-in-law have been the theme of about a dozen operas, says Prabhod Bhandhu Adhikari, a jatra patron and critic. There are figures to reflect the growth of the medium. For instance, in the early '50s, Phani Bhusan Vidyavinoda, a famous jatra actor, was paid Rs 100 a month as wages. Today, a top-ranking artiste charges a whopping Rs 6 lakh a month. Brojen De, a playwright, considered himself lucky if he received Rs 300 per play in the '50s. Today, one of the top playwrights—who writes more than 10 plays every year—earns Rs 60,000 per script. The growing commercialization and the influx of talent from cinema has induced a technical revolution. (Dasgupta:1987)

Cinema definitely has influenced jatra's style. Actors wanted to have a highlighted appearance on the jatra stage, therefore 'Cellophane-wrapped floodlights have made way for sophisticated electronic lighting devices. The audience now sits dazed through floods, tire and vanishing actors.' Dasgupta(1987) quotes. Shanti Gopal, a well-known actor and proprietor of Tarun Opera, quips: 'It lends a certain magical effect to jatra.' What's more, taking a cue from Hindi films, animals—dogs, monkeys and camels—have also started appearing on stage. The introduction of the microphone and taped music has not only attracted a larger audience, it has also drastically changed the acting style. Supriya Devi, a rage in Bengali cinema who has now turned to jatra, points out: 'The stress is now on natural acting rather than on gesticulation and voice modulation.

These were necessary earlier so that people seated far away could comprehend what was going on.' In an article, Rudra Prasad Sen Gupta, the doyen of Bengali theatre, says: 'If people think that jatra is successful because it has found its cultural roots in Bengal, that would be self-deception. It is a well-marketed substitute for cheap commercial films.' There were jatra versions of film scripts. For instance popular films like Beder Meye Josna (1989), Chhaddmabeshi (1971) are being directly adapted in different names with same stars as in the film (Arunava Sinha 1992) in jatra. Such attempts in jatra have been receiving criticism as 'escapist formulas for tension-ridden middle and lower middle class Bengalis.' Similarly the 'degradation is seen in the title of pala like Kashmir ki Kali, Kala Sher and Sirura Naari Singhasan.' However, Shanti Gopal argues to the contrary, saying, 'If show business has to survive, it has to change with the times and provide what the people want.' As more and more people flock to view the countless jatra productions that are being churned out, voices like that of Rudra Prasad are certain to get drowned in the cheers of appreciation.[33]

Advertisements in Mass Media

Jatra became a viable mode of urban entertainment only in the early 1970s, when they advertised themselves in the daily newspapers first time. In the 1950s and 60s, it was the age of professional proscenium theatre in Urban Bengal, the muffosil and rural audiences did not have access to newspaper nor were they likely to be influenced by advertisement. They simply went to the nearest show. There were not enough groups to create competition of a level that required competitions. (But change occurred) around 1970s when competition increased, and the first superstars of jatra (Like Shantigopal pal) came in. Major theatres in the city, turned any free dates over to jatras (An. May-June 1989 newspaper article 'jatra Ads'). In 1977, radio programs to advertise jatras came into vogue. For instance:

on Sunday afternoon the popular Bournvita quiz contest used to be followed a little later by a 15 minute capsule on the famous natta company production Nati-binodini. The capsule consisted of excerpts from the highest points of play, interspersed with terse announcements of self-laudatory statements. The first of the jatra reviews appeared in the arts section of Ananada Bazar Patrika. The 1980s saw an explosion in jatra advertising. A single established group provided upto Rs. 15 lakh by way of ad revenue. It found a niche from their film and theatre counterparts (Anon:1989).[34]

As per a 1987 newspaper coverage there are 'around 20,000 people with about 300 opera companies, it spells employment, and for many Bengali newspapers, it means their very survival, dependent as they are on Rs 3 crore in annual advertisements from a Rs 50-crore industry that jatra has now become.' (Dasgupta:1987).

Changing Aesthetics

The *swarna juga* (Golden Age of jatra) spans from 1938 to 1976 with the commence of few legendary jatra palakar as discussed in the next section. The Juri system and vivek character already were dropped by the 1960s. The last female impersonators lost their status. Cabaret girls came to dominate. On one hand, as Samik Bandopadhyay writes, there was a decline of the old style, on the other hand the inevitable commercialization retained its quality through great actors and their old acting style. By mid 1960s, stereotypes of jatra crept back in, despite the modernization, like those of elder king, the prince, younger prince, singer vivek and the vidushak. The best actors like Panchu Sen, Phanibhusan were more or less stereotyped. The duration of performance got reduced to 3-4 hours from 6-7 or even 12 hours in earlier times. Microphones, taped sound effects and slideshows were introduced. Microphone simplified the actors' job. Swapankumar, a veteran jatra actor introduced the microphone in his *pala* titled *Micheal Mudhusudan Dutta*.[35]

Actors could now add nuances to their dialogue unlike in yesteryears where they had to shout till the last row for the 10000th audience to hear them, even 'while saying tender things to their loved ones.' (Sudeshna Roy:16). The hazak (petromax lights) was replaced by flood lights and spot and mirror lights. The all side open stage was now blocked off on one side with a screen. (Dasgupta:1987). Modernity was introduced in terms of music, character, narratives, electric lights, sounds and mic (Das, Prabhat: 53). As it played out in traditional Bengali theatre, it was different from conventional theatre in several ways: the stage was in the centre, with the audience all around; the lighting was simple and the diction was high-pitched. The transformation of jatra songs and music is well evident from its folk moorings to modern musicals like Hindusthani classical to Rabindra sangeet to Bollywood numbers. Similarly, changes occurred in performative narratives, form mythological and imaginary texts to historical and family plots of the contemporary times. One of the best examples is Shantigopal's Hitler (1968).

The modern jatra was produced by professional jatra companies based in Kolkata. A jatra play would be first produced in the city, on the proscenium stage, albeit without the drop curtain, wings and other modern claptrap. The musicians would sit on both sides of the stage, and the acting style would be louder than in normal plays. After the premiere in the city, the jatra play would start on its regional odyssey. Unlike traditional jatra the modern jatra is structured as a modern play of short duration, for even in the villages today, jatra performances would be of a maximum of three hours duration.

Appearance of real women in Bengali jatra: **1940s**. Rimli bhattacharya notes that the long lineage of brilliant female impersonators in jatra includes Phanibhushan, Choto-Phani, Chapal Rani, the latter being the stage name of Chapal Bhaduri...Female impersonators added rani to their pseudo name (p.38). If form and content are the indispensable requirements for continuity of tradition, then jatra has been

a 'theater as magic' as Utpal Dutt (2009:170) describes.[36] Despite its denigration at every historical juncture or rather, at the emergence of modern and English educated scholarships, this form has never died. Infact, has been resilient in its robust approach to mesmerize its audience by moving from urban to rural. To summarize, Dutt has clearly noted that the survival of jatra is due to its features, distinct from its counterpart theatre. These features are:

1: Its mimetic elements
2. Robust and unashamed use of every emotion, every passion
3. It seeks to dominate audience's mind by sheer violence and brazen dramatics
4 It relies on nothing but declamation in heavy poetic prose that must capture the attention of an unruly proletarian audience by intensity of action, by royal assassination and retribution, by Machiavellian villainy and the clash of arms,
5. The jatra players respect the taste and judgment of these rough and exhausted men (coal-miners, tea-garden workers, peasants), these alienated, dull-brained workers thinking of their early morning shifts next day, sleepy-eyed with toil.

Section 3: Contemporary Bengali Jatra

Bengali jatra in the post-independence period was transformed and integrated into the mainstream urban entertainment and simultaneously continued to be the art form of the rural people. It's changing economy and aesthetics brought about a change in the form, which may have been instrumental in this form thriving until today.

In this section on folk form in a continuously changing global world, I have focused on the crisis and the resilience of the contemporary Bengali jatra since the last two decades. This section is largely an ethnographic one. The field observations during my short visits to the performance sites

in rural village and jatra festival, archival visits, interviews in and around jatrapara, reflect the contemporaneous of the form and its content. Jatra has gone through major transformations such as the introduction of Bollywood actors like Ravina Tondon, Shakti Kapoor on the one hand. On the other, playing stories like London bombings, 9/11 issue, *The Imprisoned Hero Saddam* has been the current trend of some jatra parties to 'try to touch a chord with audiences on such sensitive incidents by taking a stand,' says a known jatra director Haradhan Roy (Biswas:2005). The establishment of state patronage like the Paschimbanga Jatra Academy aims to preserve the centuries old folk theatre that reaches thousands of people for almost 200 nights every year all over Bengal and its neighboring regions. Jatra not only has been also used as a state propaganda but also to reach out the thousand overtones and hyperbole.' (TOI:2011). The emergence of State patronage is a 'political' strategy, expanding mass media, changing audience preference. Stories to portray the Chief minister Mamata Banerjee as a successful leader, who patronizes jatra industry, plays like Banglar Masnade Mamata, Mahasngrame Joyee Mamata and Ebar Mamata already have made a strong entry in Bengali jatra 'characterized by activities of the Paschimbanga Jatra Academy.

The Professional Jatra Industry: Crisis and Resilience

The jatra has metamorphosized. It emerged, died out and lost its old form and always has had a rebirth with its ways of adapting new techniques. Currently there are around sixty professional jatra companies in Chitpur, Kolkata. Apart from Kolkata, in a Telegraph report, Padhikar informs that a few professional groups exist in East and West Medinapore (over 100 troupes with approximately 5000 artists), Birbhum and Hoogly have 13 groups and East Burdwan, Murshidabad have each 20 groups with support staff. There are also troupes in Ranarghat and Digha. Rest of the groups across

the state are generally amateur. Total around 200 groups operate (98 / 111 Chapter V: Contemporary Jatra) in West Bengal. Almost 50,000[37]114 people are dependent upon this industry.

A BBC news in 2005 calculated that 'Jatra is a $21m-a-year industry, but troupe owners say they are losing money because of mounting production costs to cater to changing audience tastes. The plays are still popular — last year there were nearly 4,000 stages in West Bengal, each putting on more than one play.[38] The demands for watching the actors[39] in the guise world leaders in these plays are high.

Tapan Sarkar, the secretary of Paschimbanga Jatra Academy, in his interview, informs that generally amateur parties perform around 20-30 shows in a year, whereas professional parties produce more than 200 shows. In 2008, 10 teams performed above 150 shows, 15 teams above 100 shows and other 45 teams of Kolkata performed around 80 to 100 shows. Therefore, the production of new plays in a year is 60 palas. They also visit Assam and Tripura.

Expressing Discontents

Somya Sankar Bose from Kolkata had a photo exhibition, on the struggle of the once leading actors. 'There has been a steady decline in the number of people who like to watch jatra, leaving many artists without work.' His photographs address 'the issue of the dwindling practice of jatra and highlight former artists' inability to sustain themselves.' Jatra groups have struggled in recent years because of the easily available entertainment on television and mobile phones.'

1. **Profit generation**: Vishnupriya Sengupta reports that 'Jatra is an addiction, a passion and that is what draws people into this industry. But very few companies are actually making a profit.' says Ajit Biswas, manager of Bharat Tirtha. 'In a season, a jatra company aims at atleast 80 to 100 shows. In the past it would do at least 140

shows. So, at the end of a season, a jatra artist even today, can happily return home with a neat booty running into several lakhs,' says Deepak Nandi of Aggragami troupe of Chitpore. However, since the companies are being shot down slowly, the profit margins are lesser. The production cost has also gone high. 'Besides, with 24-hour television channels providing entertainment, people in villages are no longer interested in spending money on watching a jatra.' So one way of drawing crowds is by resorting to cheap gimmicks and obscenity. 'Young men are lured by the skimpily-clad women who figure in some jatras. It's just a survival strategy.' Apart from devising many strategies for profit generation, D. Mukherjee a proprietor of multiple jatra companies shares that 'There are many in the jatra circuit who believe that I do not understand this art but it is important for me to look into the business and the commercial aspect as well.' This led him to introduce Bollywood actors in jatra in 2005, which had a big draw in rural Bengal. To cut the production cost, the Sengupta report informs that some proprietors write and direct their own jatras.[40]

2. **Target of political wrath**: Natta-company's [41]production *Mukhyamontrir Ma* (2006) has been denied to advertise itself by the CPM mouthpiece Ganashakti. 'This never happened before, The title doesn't refer to any particular chief minister. This is a social play and as theatre practitioners, we feel it is our duty to refer to contemporary events. The story is about a mother and a son, long separated. The mother has to serve a 13-year prison term. Some of the dialogues echo the Bengal chief minister's speeches. How can that hurt their sentiments?' asked Natta. Actor/dramatist Utpal Roy points out that the pala names are less to do with the text than the commercial aspect. Bookings are made six months in advance and the one thing that sells a pala so early, is its name. 'Once, two palas on bodhus were launched simultaneously, Pujarini Bodhu and Pukurey

Bhasche Bodhur Lash. Though the first one was much better, the second grabbed most bookings because of its catchy title.' explained Roy.[42]

3. **Greedy proprietors:** they lack an understanding of the need of the present generation and 'dishonest film actors' who demand high price for their appearance.
4. **Loss of connect with the audience**: this happens because of dearth of good plays. 'Stories are not meant for common people.' says Indra Lahiri.
5. **Failures of left party government**: their absence of patronage for jatra festivals etc.
6. **Maoist movements**: in areas such as Midnapore Maoist movements have affected the staging of plays. 'That has led to a fall in rural viewership. Business has been affected by political movements.' Makhan Lal Natta says agitatedly, records Sengupta (Ibid).

The Contemporary Jatra Features:

1. The concert is just the same before the commence of jatra
2. Bengali Film stars do act in jatras as a part time earning and are paid around rupees 50,000 as per their status in the film industry.
3. The actors still sing for themselves and a mix of popular Hindi film songs and Bengali songs are being sung by the actors live.
5. Musical instruments are probably just the same as in 1970s.
6. Most of the themes of plays are centered around corruption, rape and murder.
7. Ordinarily, there are 30-40 members including artists, technicians, musicians and cook in a group.
8. Entry of Bollywood cinema and Bengali theatre actors has increased in the last two decades to add glamour: 'Jatra is regenerating and helps me overhaul myself. It's pure and it's steeped in culture.' says Kapoor, who acted in Bangla Aamar Ma in November 2017 in Calcutta.

'These actors however do not come at cheap rates,' Sengupta quotes Dipak Nandi of Agragami. This year the company has signed up Tollywood actor Pallabi Chatterjee to play the lead in its show Sagar Paray Sagarika. A successful Tollywood actor like Chiranjeet is reported to have charged Satyanarayan Opera Rs 50,000 per show last year. Shakti Kapoor, however, says that the money isn't the big draw. 'I can make five times more money if I do a few Hindi films. It's the love of the villagers of West Bengal,' he claims. But Tollywood actor Dipankar De says that for him, jatra entails playing to the galleries against a vibrant backdrop and involves a lot of physical exertion along with correct dialogue delivery and pronunciation. For, if the artiste is not up to the mark, the audience can be unforgiving. De remembers how the audience had chucked frogs at him when he had lost his voice during a performance.Tandon will play the lead role in 'Roop Sagarer Roopasi' (Beauty of the Beautiful Sea). Directed by Kanak Bhatacharya, and the show is expected to be a big draw this festive season. 'Yes, we have signed her (Tandon) for our show. She will play the lead. An actress of her repute will be seen for the first me in Bengali jatra that has mass audiences, particularly in small towns. She was very excited about the offer and we too are.' said Bhatacharya.

9. The number of scenes has been reduced from five anka (acts) to 12-14 scenes.
10. Generally a new group needs 15-20 lakh of rupees to invest in contemporary times.
11. Oldest jatra parties have closed down and no new troupes have been created in the last 10 years.
12. Some groups have more than one troupe operating under one ownership. For instance, Debanjali Opera is 17-year-old and has five troupes: Anjali Opera, Delok, Devi Bandan Jatra Santha and Devolina Opera.
13. Most of the companies perform free sell jatra than ticketed jatra show.

Revisiting Carol Farber's Field

The following section is a brief ethnographic account of my field visit during 2018 and 2019 to Kolkata and a village in Hoogly district. During the visits my interaction with the personnel of Paschimbanga Jatra academy led me visit the Kolkata's jatra industry, Chitpore road and a month long jatra festival at the academy auditorium at Bagh Bazar in North Kolkata. While watching more than 13 jatra palas in an auditorium, it hardly offered the real experience of a jatra performance in rural set up. However, towards the end of the first week of festival, tickets used to be sold in advance and sometimes they were house full. Here is an instance of the present jatra palas I observed in the festival and in a rural set up as well. Although the market of jatra has had a setback, but the continuing popularity of a jatra show in the rural belt has not really disappeared. In an interview during a live show in Balipur, one of the jatra stars, Anal Chakraborty who has 22 years of experience in theatre and jatra said:

> 'Jatra has been the base of theater and cinema. Earlier Jatra has evolved from hezag lights to LEd lights, from loud voice to soft and realistic voice through microphone and loudspeakers etc. Form is the same, but the pattern of dialogues and presentation has changed...it's going to change more and more...you see in festival Jatras... For the last 22 years, I have been experiencing a lot of changes. People come with an expectation of something new always. If you see, soon after the ongoing show before the jatra, people do not go back home. The function (he meant some other cultural program) is just extra. They are more hooked to Jatra form. The duration of Jatra performance has also changed from 4-5 acts running the whole night, to 3 hours of play. We don't have any art direction or even outdoor shooting. The stage has to be seen realistic and it is the only place of narrating the story for bie badi etc.' (Interview, January 2019)

Hisāba Kaṣā Bhalo Base: I like to calculate! (2018)

Set in Kolkata and a village nearby, the play is about a young village girl Titash and her revenge against a corrupt politician Felu Banerjee's family. Two families are the center of the play. Titash is the sister of a gandhian journalist Nabarun. In his absence, Felu's brother in law Tuhin, a pervert, kills Nabarun's father and rapes Titash. Felu Banerjee takes this opportunity to send Nabarun to jail as he wanted him to write in his favor in the coming election. Titash loses her voice and runs away from home. She is rescued by Sagar, who works for Tuhin's restaurant, but is a CBI officer in disguise. Titash becomes a modern business lady from Dubai. Later she is able to take revenge by exploiting Tuhin and family. Police arrest everyone and finally both brother and sister meet.

The orchestra continued non-stop for seven minutes before the actors appeared on stage during the jatra festival in January 2019, held by the Paschimbang Jatra Academy. The protagonist of the play, Sayanika is a film actor, known as glamour queen. This pala was written and directed by Meghdoot Gangopadhayay of Bhariab Opera based in Chitpore in Kolkata. After watching the first live jatrapala *Hishab kasha Bhalo Bashe* of Bhairav Opera (1989) at jatra festival in the Jatra Academy's proscenium stage, it took hardly any time to be introduced to the script writer and director, Meghdoot Bandopadhyay, son of veteran jatrapalakar Bhairav Ganguly. My meeting with him got fixed , in a January winter at the Bhairav Opera afternoon at Chitpur, the once known Company Bagan and now known as Rabindra Sarani. It was not too difficult to trace the locality. The GPS directly took me to the tram line as directed by Meghdoot. The place matched the thick account of anthropologist Carol Farber as I stepped onto the famous Chitpur Road that I had always aspired to see. Nothing had changed since the 1970s as Farber describes, is what I noticed when I compared her black and white pictures

with my photographs of the jatra offices in a row with big hanging hoardings. Meghdoot's voice was low when he said 'the conditions of jatra is really pathetic.' while looking back at how many old and successful Opera parties like Notta Company, Satyanarayan Opera, Bharat Barsha company had been closed down as soon as the producers died. Nearly three crore people get entertained in a year, but jatra is bereft of sufficient government attention. The financial loss is paramount.

Chapadanga-r Bou (The bride of Chapadanga)

'Chapadanga-r Bou', speaks the language of the opposition in Bengal and describes the ruling regime's 'excesses.' Kanak Bhattacharya, a jatra producer, said: 'Right now, a political message of how people are being tortured by ruling party politicians and mafia are being shown through "Chapadanga-r Bou," where the voice of protest is silenced by politicians and their goons. The jatra ends with the honest lady police officer fighting for the common people being shot dead. The appeal is to the conscience of the people, so that corrupt politicians can be thrown away.'[43]

The name of the pala is borrowed from a 1954 Bengali film. The play is produced by Sandhyadeep Opera of Chitpore. The chief actors were none other than the very famous jatra stars Kakali Choudhury and Anal Chakraborty. The producer of Muktamanjari Jatra Party is a 24-year-old jatra company with Nepal Sarkar sitting at the booking office, who informed me about the current productions in a year, ranging between 100-120 in number of shows. They travel to Bankura, Purulia, Medinapur and Burdawan. Babul Chowdhury with thirty years of experience in twelve jatra companies as a booking and team manager, says, 'jatra is for villagers as theatre and cinema are not available.' It justifies my curiosity when we had a troublesome journey to reach Balipur Jatra Camp in Hoogly district, a village 100 kilometer away from Kolkata. I watched it on 20 Jan 2019

performed at Balipur high school in Hoogly district, 50 km away from Kolkata. This three hour long play started at 9 pm, followed by a melody program by some television stars on the same stage. Audiences did not leave the tent as expected after watching the glamorous singers on stage. It was a ticketed show. The price of ticket was 50 rupees. Eight thousand audiences were sitting all around the tent on the ground, with female viewers sitting mostly sit on one side. There was a disruption of the loud speakers and the audiences from the rear, stopped the scene, asking for the repair and repeat the scene. The organisers apologized and the scene was repeated.

To save jatra as the best medium of entertainment, in both the plays, the protagonists speak about the 'goodness' of jatra. For instance, in Hisab kasha bhala basa, Nabarun towards the end in the play speaks about the future of jatra: 'Jatra is the only medium of teaching and create good environment than television serials.' The open-air theatre does not only enable active audience being part of the direct engagement but it also becomes a ground for participation. Titash in HKBB asks the audience for justice and audience answered her question. In a similar fashion, Anal Chakraborty in Chapadanger Bou, appeals to the audiences not to watch TV series that destroys our age old joint family system and respect to our women in family.

Pashchimbanga Jatra Akademi (PJA): State Patronage

Jatra in West Bengal has been patronized by influential people since its professionalization. From the nineteenth century onwards zamindars, kings, landlords, rich business men and now the Government has been the new patron. Jatra festival, first of its kind was organized by the king of Sobhabazar in palace by king Deb in 1961. Such conservative efforts of 'massive' and beneficial and promotional activities came into existence in March 2005 under the information and cultural Affairs department, government of West Bengal.

Major Activities of the PJA

1. **Jatra Festival: 32 days long State Jatra Utsab**: Inaugurated by the Chief Minister since 2013 at Kachari Maidan in Barasat for 'laudable enthusiasm and participation of masses,' it was a remarkable success. The festival continues in their auditorium: Phanibhusan Vidyabinod Mancha in North Kolkata is built for organising jatra palas and also for workshop and seminars. West Bengal also has district level jatra festivals which go on for 3 days.
2. **Workshops**: young aspirant jatra artists attend workshops. At least 50 such aspiring artists have been trained by renowned jatra artists, directors, singers.
3. **Awards**: Rs.1 lakh for outstanding contribution to jatra in general,[44]121 (Shanti-gopal-tapan Kumar) and Rs.25000 (Bina dasgupta) for remarkable contributions to jatra.
4. **Grant-in-aid and pension**: this is provided to 'express sympathy to the distressed jatra artists.' About 528 jatra artists have been benefited till date.
5. **Publications**: journals are being published. 6 volumes of Pashchimbanga Jatra Akademi Patrika by PAJ and Jatra Darpan by jatra producers have been published since 2013
6. **Stickers**: jatra troupes are provided stickers for their vehicles for their smooth mobility around the state-owned jatra spaces.
7. **Permissions and taxes**: administrative clearance/ approval for staging jatra in different districts has been eased, so that the jatra organisers can obtain administrative clearance by paying minimum tax.
8. **Publicity for jatra pala**: a journal is published in collaboration with the 3 associations of jatra community. This journal—Jatra Darpan, contains details such as the jatra palas on the day of rath jatra of the current year, opening of a poster exhibition pf jatra palas, ceremonial

booking of jatra palas involving media for wider publicity and so on. x

9. **Pension**: the government has already lowered the tax paid by the jatra companies by a huge margin.[45]

Functionalities of the PJA: Tapan Kumar Sarkar's Account

Tapan Kumar has been an avid viewer of jatra since his childhood. Being a West Bengal administrative officer, he was the first secretary of the Academy. Here is a brief account of PJA (interview July 2018 and January 2019): 'There is Pachimbanga Jatra Sangha—association of jatra producers. We communicate through this association and other two organizations at Chitpur: Sangrami jatra prahari of actors and Kalikata jatra karmi of technicians. They are very active in our committee and are included as members like president and secretary of PJA. These associations are very old and are registered under society registration act.

The Akademi decides about the festival and policies through several meetings. Currently Arup Biswas, the commissioner of public works department as well as the chairman of film academy, is the president of Akademi. Then government (minister) decides about the member secretary of academy followed by the general body members. Budget is allocated by the govt. During the festival, each jatra group is paid rupees 20,000 and memento by the Akademi. Regarding financial assistance, we receive application and we also do a door to door survey. Rs. 5000 per month as a pension to those who have retired from jatra, are more than 60 years old, are diseased, or who are living alone without good financial condition. There is also a one-time grant, which has been increased this year from rupees 9,000 to rupees 15,000. The pension is decided by the concerned committee.

Medinipur, Purulia, Bankura, Hoogli, North-South 24 Pragnas have the highest audiences for jatra shows. We

support their movements etc. There is a circular from the govt about organizing jatra camps, police protection and other fees to be paid like electricity etc. jatra organizers sometime contact us if they have any problem during its organization. No political leader is involved in having a jatra company. In Chitpur most professional troupe producers don't have other businesses and are fully into jatra. They have a maximum of 2 palas in a year. Parties chalk out their performances for the whole year, performing one night in one place. On the other hand, the festival organizers usually organize for three to five days in a year.

We are attempting to save jatra in its original form. For its survival, there has to be some change. The producers cannot run a troupe with loss. If a mythological play is done in 2019 by a jatra party, it would not draw 8000 audiences. We instruct what to do and what not do in the pala production. Otherwise it would have lost its culture. Government is not providing subsidies, therefore, producers have to ensure their profit. With a view to popularize jatra, we are planning to organize jatra palas with other cultural activities. Arup Biswas has suggested to the councilors of Kolkata to perform jatras along with other cultural events in the city for 10-15 days or so. In Dumdum in 2017, Jatra was organized at the initiation of the minister Data Basu who is also a theatre personality.'

Jatra Festivals: A Ground for Political Impetus

A month long jatra festival is organised by PJA, spending more than a crore of rupees every year. This festival is inaugurated by the chief minister of West Bengal at the famous Kachari Maidan in Barasat. A content analysis of various speeches of the Chief Minister offers an understanding of the political relationship with the age old jatra in Bengal.

Following are some excerpts of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's inaugural speech, during the Jatra Festival: 'As time passes we realize their importance. We remain

indebted to them for making us proud in the world of art and culture."[46]Speaking on the occasion in 2018, Banerjee reiterated her commitment to keep the tradition of jatra alive. She also took on her critics who take potshots at her for 'too many festivals.' 'It is impossible to imagine our lives without festival. Problems will be there but we must never stop celebrations.' she said. 'We are alive because our culture is alive. Society thrives because of heritage.' the CM commented. Referring to folk artists who have been roped in to perform at government functions, the CM said she will also use the talent of jatra artists for the same. The State Government has come up with 'Jatra Darpan'—a booklet consisting of various jatra groups and a copy has been given to all district magistrates and police superintendents in the districts in an effort to rejuvenate jatra culture in the state.

Jatra festivals have become a ground for showcasing one's own story as that of a leader. Newspapers cover 'Those in the industry of the popular folk-theater form of Bengali stage-acting spread throughout most of this part of the sub-continent seem to be mesmerized by the life and times of Mamata. As many as six jatras in Chitpur's jatra para are currently being produced on how Mamata struggled and made it as the chief minister of Bengal. Now with a story as lively and famous as Mamata's, the directors hope to bring back all the lost crowd back to the jatra. So far, only famous historical names like Subhas Bose, Lenin etc. have been featured in jatra. But now jatras, ready to take the rural Bengal by storm from the Pujas, will stage the life of a mass leader. The palas (jatras) lined up for Puja release are Banglar Masnade Mamata, Mahasangrame Joyee Mamata, Swapner Netri Mamata, Bangla abar Mamatamoyee, Banglar Khomotaye Ebar Mamata and Lalgarher Chele Nandigram-er Meye. The unique aspect of these jatras will be Rabindra Sangeet numbers which will be sung at regular intervals, knowing the fetish the chief minister has for Tagore's songs. The directors are fervently banking on the new chief minister to draw the crowds and revive the

sick jatra industry. It will be a symbolic growth. For, jatra means journey, and Mamata's journey has been the most eventful in the recent history of Bengal. She has overthrown the 34-year-old Marxist regime (TNN: 2011).[47]

In the next inaugural speech, she reiterates that 'I want Jatra artistes to live with dignity. We extend financial assistance to them. We are increasing the one-time grant to Jatra artistes from Rs 9,000 to Rs 15,000. I would urge Jatra artistes to stage more productions depicting the modern life, successful projects like Kanyashree or Sabooj Sathi.'[48] (January 2019)

The political strategy of supporting a vast majority and using jatra as a platform for propagation of its developmental scheme shows that Mamta Banerjee has been alert in continuing her politics. Therefore, it is not surprising to come across jatras portraying her and politics in the state. She was already popular before coming to power in the state. Kanyashree Prakalpa, the Mamata Banerjee government's flagship cash-transfer scheme aimed at checking child marriage in Bengal, that was awarded the United Nationals Public Service Award, is all set to make its debut on the Bengali folk-theatre stage. In a fortnight's time, Digbijoyi Opera will unveil their new 'jatra pala' titled 'Kanyashreer Joware Biswajoyee Mamata.' Director Kartik Samanta had staged a jatra titled 'Maa Maati Manush' that traced how Banerjee had come to power.

Jatras during the electoral poll in 2019 have been most in the limelight. In the backdrop of high-voltage electoral theatre, a different sort of poll drama is being plotted in the bylanes of Chitpur. Kolkata's bastion of jatra has not been able to escape the influence of politics this poll season. At least five jatras called 'high-voltage theater of politics' are on the move. But what has stood out is the direct reference to politics and political events, even in the titles of some of these productions.

At least two—*Mamata-r Daake Dilli Chalo* and *Bhalo Manuser Bhat Nei*—fall in this category. The first is a direct reference

to Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee's battle cry to defeat the BJP in Delhi and carve out a space for herself and like-minded parties in the national capital. The second revolves around citizens' hardships during demonetisation, another Trinamool pet theme. Haradhan Ray, a jatra official, said the issue of demonetization was well highlighted in *Bhalo Manuser Bhat Nei*, and that it was well accepted by the audience who could easily connect with the harassments they faced. *Mamata-r Daake Dilli Chalo* took its cue from Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's clarion call on January 19 at the Brigade rally to march to Delhi. Trinamool leaders across the state lapped up the idea of staging it to convey Didi's message, and it's been in regular production for the last three months. It was first staged in the city at Baranagar's Bidhan Park, where MP Saugata Roy and state ministers Bratya Basu and Tapas Roy were present. Dilip Narayan Basu, the councilor of Baranagar municipality, who hosted the show, said they wanted the political message of the Trinamool chief to reach the masses properly before the Lok Sabha polls. Sita Ghosh, playing the lead role in *Mamata-r Daake Delhi Chalo*, who is also an assistant director of the jatra, admitted they received patronage from Trinamool, particularly in south Bengal. 'There were regular shows till early April and though we had a show on Tuesday, it had to be postponed due to a squall. The jatra starts with Maoists killing people in Jangalmahal. Later, the rebels surrender to the chief minister, attracted by her charismatic appeal to join the mainstream. The concept was finalized in September and we decided to stage the jatra with this particular name as Didi was planning the Brigade rally. Our jatra ends with Didi's speech at the January 19 rally,' Ghosh said. The jatra, she said, portrays the characters of four Trinamool leaders: Subrata Bakshi, Aroop Biswas, Subhendu Adhikari and Sonali Guha. It even portrays some BJP leaders but not Narendra Modi or Amit Shah, nor is there an Abhishek Banerjee, said Ghosh, adding, 'Intra-party feuds have been depicted,' says Ghosh. Sita, who has been a jatra actor for

three decades, said it was tough portraying the CM on a daily basis. To keep getting better, she keeps abreast of the news on TV and always watches the CM's speeches to pick up nuances in mannerisms. 'I even changed my spectacles to look similar to the ones the CM uses,' she said.[49]In her recent speech in 2020 the CM expresses that, 'I appeal to all of you to create a mass movement against NRC and CAA[50]... Jatra upholds society. Therefore, I appeal to all of you to support jatra. I want jatra artistes to get respect.'[51]

'Folk theatre is a very popular entertainment event for the people living in rural Bengal. It reflects rural Bengal's ground reality, socio-economic scenario and plight of the common people. If issues like CAA, NRC and NPR are highlighted by folk theatre, it will have a direct and deep impact,' said a senior Trinamool leader, explaining the logic behind Mamata's move to reach out to the artistes. The Trinamool supremo also instructed her party workers to stage short dramas on the CAA at street corners in rural pockets of Bengal. 'The members of our students' wing have been asked to prepare the scripts for short dramas and stage it in their locality,' said the leader.[52]

Sovabazar-based Natta Company, which has been regaling audiences across Bengal for more than a century, has become the target of political wrath for the title of its latest play, Mukhyamontrir Ma. The troupe has been denied advertisement space in CPM mouthpiece Ganashakti and some individuals are reportedly threatening to not let the jatra be performed.'This never happened before,' said Makhanlal Natta, proprietor of the 137-year-old group. 'The title doesn't refer to any particular chief minister. This is a social play and as theatre practitioners, we feel it is our duty to refer to contemporary events. There is no ban order, but some individuals have vowed not to let the pala to be performed.' The story is about a mother and a son, long separated. The mother has to serve a 13-year prison term. 'Some of the dialogues echo the Bengal chief minister's speeches. How can that hurt their sentiments?' asked Natta.

To conclude this section on the growth and resilience of popular folk theatre of Jatra in post-independence Bengal, it is fascinating to uncover the enthralling popularity of jatra among rural and urban viewers. This could only be possible because of the changes and experiments executed in and about the form. Influences are many and therefore so is the patronization—from religious leaders to rich landlords to the kings and in contemporary time the state, along with the jatra producers of Chitpore road in Kolkata. The 'intellectual ferment in early nineteenth century Calcutta' is the most attributable to colonial rule (Marshall: 1988;180-182). Cultural expression like jatra was accepted by both intellectuals and non-literate across Bengal. The mutual dependence of performative aspects of urban and rural like language, wide spectrum of styles, themes, gimmicks is immense. As Flueckiger (1993:423) reviews Lutgendorf's work (1991) on Rāmcharitmānas where the high-caste intellectuals dismissed it as something only 'uneducated people do,' one sees a close similarity of folk jatra with urban jatra. It could be migration, education or even popularity of new performative styles from urban Calcutta among 'uneducated mass.'

Notes

1. Shovabazar palace in Kolkata is a royal family palace. The king has been patronised jatra troupes several times along with many diginitaries of the town including Rabindranath Tagore.
2. Bangla Jatraer Bibartan; Nabikaran O Samasya< (Evolution of Bengali Jatra: Transformation and Its Problem), Chapter 1: 57, Jatra sange Bere Utha, 2014.
3. Brajendra Kumar Dey: Puraner Natun Mulyan: (Evaluating the old in a new way) Ratan Kumar Mandal, pp. 119-123 - Jatra Acadmy patrika: no 3, January 200884.
4. Mazumdar, Jaideep, When Hitler Took a Bow, 10 March 2010, https://openthemagazine.com/art-culture/when-hitler-took-a-bow/, date of access:29 July 2020.

5. SEBANTI SARKAR, Man who was Hitler, The Telegraph, 21.03.10. https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/west-bengal/man-who-was-hitler/cid/1269984
6. Veteran 'Jatra' artist Shantigopal Pal dies, November 05, 2012 https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/veteran-jatra-artist-shantigopal-pal-dies-50371185
7. See Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker, Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory, and Urban Performance in India Since 1947,University of Iowa Press, 2009.
8. Excerpt from her essay: Urban theatre and the turn towards 'folk', chapter 11 in The Cambridge Companion to Modern Indian Culture, Vasudha Dalmia, and Rashmi Sadana, ed.
9. Mee, Theatre of roots: redirecting the Modern Indian stage, Seagull, Kolkata, 2008, p586.
10. Bishnupriya Dutt, The 'Revolution' through Popular Forms, https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/scapvc/theatre/research/networksandcollaborations/jnu/colloquium/jnu_papers/bishnupriya_dutt.pdf Date of access 10/6/202087
11. See for a detailed career in theatre of Utpal Dutt : Banerjee (1993: 1848), video documentary titled Utapl Dutt: A Biography, published in Youtube on March 4, 2015.
12. Rehearsals of Revolution: The Political Theater of Bengal, 1983, University of Hawaii Press, University of Michigan.
13. Partha Chatterjee, Theatre and the Publics of Democracy: Between Melodrama and Rational Realism Theatre Research International, Volume 41, Issue 3O ctober 2016 , pp. 202-221.
14. Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker, Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory, and Urban Performance in India Since 1947, University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, 2005.
15. "...due to the inspiration of Shailen Mohanto, the owner of Satyambar Opera, Dutt returned to Jatra and wrote Jallianwalabagh. He contributed and directed around thirty palas for the professional Jatra of Chitpur. His plays were produced by pro- fessional groups like New Arya Opera, Loknatya, Ganabani, Tarun Opera etc." (Debayan Deb Barman quotes Prabhat Das: 2014:186).
16. Bidhayak Bhattacharya, Manmatha Roy, Shailajananda Mukhopadhyay and others (Gupta 2010: p.166).
17. It was produced by Sri Ma Natya Company and had its premier on 27th September, 1970 in the Protap Memorial Hall, Kolkata.

18. Revolution: Theatre as a weapon", interview by A.J. Gunawardana. Tulane Drama review.
19. "Taking Shakespeare to the Common Man," interview, Oxygen News, Shakespeare Quarter Centenary Supplement, 1964, repr., Epic Theatre (March 1999:19).
20. India's Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation, and Performance,edited by Poonam Trivedi And Dennis Bartholomeusz,Pearson Education India, 2005:159.
21. Rehearsals of Revolution, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983:62.
22. In Colonial Narratives: Discoveries of India in the Language of Colonialism (London Routledge, 1996:142).
23. In Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics (London: Routledge, 1996).
24. Poonam Trivedi and Ryuta Minami, eds.2010: Re-playing Shakespeare in Asia. London and New York: Routledge. From Proscenium to Paddy Fields : Utpal Dutt's Shakespeare Jatra by Tapati Gupta, pp.157. There is no video or audio documentary as such of Bhuli Nahi Priya. Gupta's first hand interview with actors Kanaklata (April 2008)and wife Shova Sen and manuscript and photographs of the play (p.196).
25. It was a special distinction of Utpal Dutt's Shakespeare productions that he made Shakespeare available not only to the urban middle-class but also to the rustic farmers who had not even heard the name of Shakespeare before. Dutt observed with wonder the effect created by Macbeth in a village called Begumpur .The villagers had no idea where Scotland was, nor were they acquainted with the social norms of Macbeth's world. But they understood ambition and kingship, loyalties and morality, emotions, poetry, passion and human weakness. So they understood Macbeth's tragedy. (Gupta,2009:168).
26. https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=4&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwi00f67n6vpAhWDWX0KHR2YBaIQFjADegQIARAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fshodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in%2Fbitstream%2F10603%2F103732%2F10%2F10_chapter%25205.pdf&usg=AOvVaw1phsmtLBvFr-BeM2rrWv4E
27. Koel Chatterjee,2018, Bollywood Shakespeares from Gulzar to Bhardwaj: Adapting, Assimilating and Culturalizing the

Bard, 2017. PhD thesis, Royal Holloway University of London, p. 94.
28. BANERJEE, Arnab (2012) » Rehearsals for a Revolution: The Political Theatre of Utpal Dutt«Southeast Review of Asian Studies,(34): 222-23094.
29. Debayan Deb Barman,When the Popular is Political: The Case of Utpal Dutt's Jatra, with Focus on "SanyasirTarobari", Indian Literature, Vol. 58, No. 6 (284) (Nov./Dec. 2014), pp. 183-191, Sahitya Akademi.
30. Jatra: making Money from Melodrama, The Economics Times, Kolkata, Sunday 4 August 1992.
31. Swapan Mullick, jatra retreats to safe Mythology, Newspaper article (no details available).
32. As coined by Kartick Samanta , the proprietor of Digvijay Opera . He has a mechanical background brought the concpet of multiplae stages-with wings, backdrp , revolving mechanism. Arunav Sinha traces its origin through popular opinion to the expression of 'cyclonic drama'.
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CHAPTER 5

Epilogue

In the year 2020 when I reviewed the status of jatra that has had a chequered past, it appeared to be a sustainable industry in comparison to Bengali cinema and modern theatre. The rise and fall of the industry would be thriving till rural Bengal continues to appreciate and patronize it.

'Jatra Dekhe Fatra Lok, Bhodralok Dekhena'

This popular saying as emerged from the 'bhadralok culture' in the nineteenth century appears to be an exaggeration. It is true that in the last two centuries, jatra companies had to move themselves to peripheral regions. However, the 'illiterate' viewers of the marginalized segments of society never let the tradition die. On the one hand, as a 'lower class' form, it got criticism from the intellectual class, on the other hand, it was picked apart due to its 'declining classicality.' There is a debate over the loss of 'authenticity' of its structure. In a recorded interview with Kalibabu, Janaki Meda and Anadi chakraborty by Natyashodh Sansthan in the early 1990s, about the contemporary problems of jatra, Janki Meda laments on the Krishna jatras known as *jatragaan*, like Manbhanjan, Shri Radha, Kalki Avatar etc. performed by amateur troupes in his village around the 1940s. He criticizes 'jatra is neither the pala (of his time) nor theatre. It is a business. Theatrical jatra has lost its Moulikata (originilaty) *maliker galagat, adi jatra sesh hoi jaeche, light khela to thik ache*... .' Kalibabu's response to Mukul Ghosh is that 'jatra has to be (separated from producers) produced by

actor and director...changes have happened due to money. The classical raga based jatra of Phanibhusan, Panchu Sen, which played through the night, has been abolished.' All the participants in jatra had already resigned themselves to the fact that we have to walk along with changing times. But why has playback singing been introduced, why are actors unable to sing. Similarly, Khaled Chowdhury said, between form and content, form should never be changed. Jatra seems to be dying as the writer and directors work for money, that is why the name of producer in the advertisement in newspaper is more visible...jatra fatra...music is gone, actors can't sing proper classical songs..."

The people of Kolkata criticize it saying that the jatra of 1970s-80s should have been continuing.

Originally meant to educate the masses (*lok shiksha*) and serve as a window to the world outside, jatra has moved a long way off. Thematically, mythology and history have made way for Tollywood-like social and domestic plots. The harmonium, flute and violin have been substituted by the synthesizer and the use of modern equipment, mics and the play of sound and light, called cyclorama, used specifically by jatra company Digvijay Opera have given jatra, once a folk art, a more synthetic flavor. I quote Anal Chakraborty once again here about the survival of the Bengali jatra, while comparing with Bangla television series. For him these popular series are 'destructive of family and society' unlike jatra stories represented with political/social issues for change.

> 'In our Paschimbanga we have diversities-different languages, culture, dialects, different taste of humour politics, knowledge etc. so we have to think for its acceptance to all through one drama. *Emon ekta khabar amra tiari karee.. sei khabar ta sabai khete parbe? eta amake bhabte hobe...purulia aar bankura gale alada karte hobena...sei mote amake production ta tiari karte hue...natak mote aneke kichu scientific techniques apply karte hue, jonta sadharan manush mathar upare chole jate parbena...(We need to produce in such a way that can be liked*

> *and received by all kinds of audiences whether in Bankura or Purulia)…*We are not very popular in Kolkata. but when we perform in Kolkata, we get our houseful instantly where as in a theater performance, it takes an hour to have a house full. The only thing we are bereft of, is the media attention. It is all because we don't advertise ourself so much, unlike cinema or theatre or even television. We are behind it. Unlike the saying 'Jatra dekhe fatra lok, bhadralok dekhena,' people are educated, accepting new thinkings...earlier the situation was different. On 1 January this year we were shown on TV, it got so popular and people have come to watch us live. There is no illiterate people any more. The agriculturalists generation are no more farmers. They do engineering… Future of jatra won't get damaged. Cinema might disappear ..but Jatra is such a catchy medium as a live show, it's such a long tradition—like Dirgha nadi...shape might change …like the research on jatra won't get over…(Interview : Jan 2019)

Some scriptwriters are determined to preserve its essence. Says Utpal Ray, a leading scriptwriter: 'Jatra has very little space for gimmicks and techniques. As long as a socially relevant message is conveyed through a good storyline, it is bound to have takers.' Ray has written scripts criticizing the Narmada dam project, on female infanticide and is at present working on a script for the Natta Company. If it meets with an overwhelming response, it would, perhaps, spell a new script for jatra[1].

Bengali jatra of the early nineteenth century had tremendous impact on the other jatra theatre tradition in Assam, Tripura and Odisha, though the cultural practices have evolved within their own regional histories. The jatra forms in all these regions were heavily drawn from Bengali jatras during visits on Dussera and other religious occasions held by the Bengali officers and zamindars during the colonial era. Sri Chaitanya is perhaps the influencer of Krishna jatra in the Eastern and North eastern parts of India. Common origin/history, form, structure, linguistic affinity if not the same, but different manifestations in the contemporary times due to common territory and common

administrators/ ruling powers in different historical period. Jatras in four regions share a common point of origin of influence-Bhakti/ Krishna jatra of Chaitanya Bengal and migrated to Odisha, Assam and now to Tripura. Geographical continuity, migration, Interaction through yearly movements, crisscrossing of people in pre-colonial and colonial times, opened more avenues in Bengal, Assam, Odisha and Tripura. The influence of Bengali jatra upon Odia and Assamese jatra contibues through the intervention and hegemony of Bengali culture, politics and linguistic nationalism. The cultural region beyond political geography did not get disrupted or mutilated by colonial distortion. That's how the folk performances survived, disappeared and transformed. They are surviving under the pressure of colonial and post-colonial cultural transformation.

Ranjan Bhattacharya[2] traces that mobile theatre took such an organised form after a long journey of more than thirty years in which it was in the form of Yatra and Opera in the initial stage. Mobile theatre is 'an industry in its own right with an annual turnover of over Rs 10 crore, the popularity of the Assamese theatre is capturing professional actors from the Assamese films due to which the market for the films has gone down in the recent years. (Anusuya Paul: 2013:22)[3] The history of jatra and its continuity in Tripura can be traced through the Bangladeshi jatra with reference to the migration of Hindu Bengalis to the region. Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya and Birendra Kishore Manikya until independence, brought 2-3 jatra groups from Dhaka and Kolkata and introduced modern musical instruments. Such cultural encounters have also led to an influence over the indigenous locales. Therefore, jatra in Kokborak, the widely spoken indigenous language, was also in vogue. How this form underwent change in different cultural and political set up/elements and how it is comparable between Bengal and Tripura and then again different in Odisha and Assam are the subject of further research.

Bengali Jatra - Odia Jatra: A Contrast

Odia and Bengali jatra share many commonalities but have distinctive characteristics in regard to origin, evolution and growth in changing social structure and identity. My previous study on Odia jatra reveals the social world of the entertainment form that entertained millions of Odias for many centuries and has been, maybe, the dominant culture industry. This popular theatre can be understood as a social microcosm of the society they portray live on the stage. Jatra expresses certain aspirations for a very own Odia (or Bengali) version of the modern and desirable, a constant contradiction torn between tradition and modernity, old and new morality still playing along the old scheme of East and West. This mechanism is often reflected in Bollywood cinema, where 'Bollywood is a metaphor of what many have seen as a peculiar Indian historical capacity: it serves as an antechamber or conduit, where the foreign and the modern are received, entertained, and made Indian.' (Khilnani 2002)

The engagement of audience in jatra is intimate. For instance, as 'Asit Bose, assistant director of this production and a reputed actor playwright himself, pointed out that in the case of jatra, the actors would enter and exit the acting area over the ramps placed on the right and left of the jatra stage which was almost at the visual level of a seated audience that is, about one and a half or two feet from the ground. On the proscenium stage there would be two "flats" placed at the back with a gap of 5 or 6 feet from each other. These acted as "doors" for the actors.' (Tapati Gupta:2009:167)

Krushna Chandra Bhuyan mentions a contrast between the function and role of Bengali jatra and Odia jatra during this period. Odisha experienced its first modern, urban drama only after 1880. Ramshankar Ray's *Kaṅci Kāverī* is generally recognized as the first modern Odia play, staged in Cuttack in the year 1881. This literary creation was based upon 'the subservient and down cast Odias…supported by the glorious and heroic incident (legends) of the Utkalas.'[4]

A blend of religious sentiments, chauvinistic spirit and social instincts, Kanchi Kaveri articulated nationalism and 'emerged as a powerful symbolic capital' for cultural and political mobilization[5]. To disseminate the message of Odia nationalism through the narration of its glorious history, Ramshankar Ray wrote fourteen imaginary, mythological and social dramas from 1881 to 1917. He attempted to produce two jatras—Baḍaloka in 1913 and Biśvajagñā in 1916—to popularize Madhusudan Das's revolution for cottage industries, national congress and outrage over the partition of Bengal.

However, most jatra troupes did not perform historical, social and nationalist plays. Contrary to the reformists, revivalists urged jatra troupes to re-establish ideals of bhakti by means of drama. By adapting episodes of the Puranas such as stories of Dhruva, Prahalada, Sudama, etc., in modern patriotic dramas, *gītābhinayas* and *gītināṭyas* affirmed Odia identity and the changes that were taking place under the amalgam of culture, politics and nationalism. The reaction against Bengali linguistic hegemony was made through the presentation of 'mythological-historical' jatras in the Odia language. Operatic jatras had to disseminate religious values and ethos through traditional themes and forms to be a part of the Save Odia Language movement. Ramshankar Ray received patronage from the patriotic *mahant* (the head of religious endowments) of the Kothapada monastery. Such patronage was also offered by kings to bestow social prestige on playwrights. Plays like Ashwini Kumar's *Hindū Ramaṇi* or *Master Bābū* revealed the greatness of Hindu women and reflected the conception of *Rāmarajya* and the native movement for independence.[6] Continuing the authentic *Kṛṣṇa Līla* of Odisha was a reaction to the emerging hatred by sections of the Bengali population. These independent traditions were not derivative of Western opera, but were rather distinct forms of musical theatre that had deep roots in national socio-religious traditions. The Odias of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries not only

created indigenous jatras, but also retained an independent regional identity as part of the Odia language movement while recounting their glorious past. With this constant exchange of performance techniques, texts and performative representation between proscenium-style theatre and jatra, the latter became increasingly popular in the region.

From the 1880s till the 1940s, mahantas, zamindars, kings of the princely states, Odia officers working under the British government and emerging industrialists in Calcutta largely patronized Odia jatra. In the 1920s, organizing jatras during religious festivals was a 'symbol of prestige' for patrons.

The *ostāds* were not only paid for the performance, but also received money for transportation, accommodation and food. Sometimes, for *farmasi* (request) poems at the behest of their patrons, the *ostāds* were rewarded with gold watches, gold earrings, silk shawls, dhoti joḍa and cash. The dominant poets were appointed as salaried employees by their patrons to organize their troupes.

Popular Hinduism and popular religious literature as the constituents of nationalism and regional identity structured the form and narratives of jatra. The jatra of colonial Odisha was intimately associated with Vaishnava institutions. Its viewers' belief systems were inherently connected to the myths of Hindu gods and goddesses. For first four decades of the twentieth century, jatras were often adopted from Balarama Dasa's *Odia Rāmayaṇa* (Jagmohan Rāmayaṇa), Sarala Dasa's *Sārālā Mahābhārata*, Purana episodes, folk legends, mythology and from every possible indigenous source. Well-known episodes from these texts were selected for performances as they were familiar to the Odia masses, with easily recognizable heroes and themes. Though jatras drew from the same textual sources, successive jatra poets represented the most popular episodes in their own styles. Popularly known as Jollywood[7] in Odisha as a Large-Scale Industry, jatra has frequency of productions and performances as more than 250 productions in a year by one jatra party. The entry of politicians in productions

houses has begun though government patronage in encouraging festivals etc. like the Jatra academy is absent unlike Bengal. There is huge investment in the structure of the performance space but there is no market of booking offices in one a particular, like Chitpur of Kolkata which is a hub and market of jatra. In the recent time, Odia jatra are highly commercialized and self-sufficient. In terms of the originality of the form, actors in Bengali jatra themselves sing on stage, whereas there is only playback singing in Odia jatra during the enactment of the performance.

Recapitulation of the Major Changes in Bengali Jatra

Anand Lal, in his The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre, (2004) has an apt short description of Bengali Jatra from its origin to growth in contemporary times.

> The earliest mentions of performance approximating Jatra come in the sixteenth century, when biographers of saint Chaitanya … draw attention to the association of Vaishnava devotion with the medium of song and dance, not confined to *namsankirtan* (chanting God's name), to popularize a priestess' adoration based on bhakti. … Jatra easily became the most popular performing art and an integral part of village life in greater Bengal (including Bihar, Orissa, and Assam). Gradually, myths with pronounced human interest like *Harishchandra* and *Nala-Damayanti* ('Nala and Damayanti') joined the purely rural Krishna, Rama, and Manasa Jatras, to be secularized further with the addition of *Vidya-Sundar* ('Vidya and Sundar,' 1752) by Bharatchandra (1712-60), court poet of Raja Krishnachandra of Nabadwip, Nadia district. Although *Vidya-Sundar* (or *Annada mangal*, 'Propitiation of Annada') belonged to the medieval Mangal-kavya (propitiatory verse) tradition, its valorization of romance and sexuality sought only an ultimate sanctification through the adoration of Annada. Its success coincided with Jatra's spatial shift to the newly growing city of Calcutta for easy accessibility, turning professional under the guidance of owner-managers who booked actors for the 'season,' from

> Durga Puja in autumn to the start of the next monsoon. The nouveau riche in Calcutta, too, formed amateur Jatra groups mainly for *Vidya-Sundar* shows which reveled in the *khemta*, a light dance accompanied by loud gestures and swinging steps, and in extensive wordplay, riddles, and sexual innuendoes of which Gopal Ure was the best-known exponent … After the 1920s Jatra went through major changes, the most important being its institutional settlement in the metropolis. (245-47)

The shift from folk to popular theatre occurred as nineteenth century Calcutta experienced modernity and cultural renaissance. Therefore, the urbanization and industrialization turned folk culture into a hybrid, while synthesizing with modern proscenium theatre of the West and folk songs-plays of the East. Jatra has definitely undergone multiple changes in its form, structure and representations. To make it simple, the changes in terms of themes, performances, music and style are evident as soon as one observes and participates in jatra shows. The transition in themes from mythological stories to social, political issues has been reflected in each of the religious sect and political succession in Bengal from its very origin. The inclusion of women as actors in place of the female impersonators has been a change that empowers women as long as the professionalization of the form continues. The performance on permanent stages in the cities, incorporating advance technology instead of rural makeshift stages, is certainly a significant change.

The book has a very vast historical time line. However, to justify the historical exigencies one can reflect upon there major inflection points. First the colonial influences on Indian/Bengal folklore, secondly the partition of the Indian state and emergence of Bangladesh as an Islamic state, thereby the change in themes. East Bengalis stopped enacting Hindu religious themes in jatra palas, expanding instead into social themes and getting trapped in entertainment with more of sexual appeal. Thirdly, the reach to a vast audience, using theatre as a tool for commercial advertisement and politics,

state patronization in terms of a Jatra Academy is definitely a reason of its sustainability in an era of digital media and culture. At the same time a grand fusion of cinema, theatre and jatra in Bengal is also a key reason of success.

Towards making of Modern Bengali Jatra

The cultural renaissance in Bengal witnessed a period of great intellectual, artistic and cultural awakening during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. European Enlightenment had certainly a direct impact on English educated intellectuals, to rejuvenate the rich cultural heritage. This shaped the literature, music, theatre, art, education and social and political reforms, which became the features of cultural renaissance of Bengal—for both West Bengalis and East Bengalis. The discourse of Bengali culture in contemporary time got influenced by the partition of Bengal. This led to the development of distinct cultural identities. The political ideologies—communism, nationalism, socialism, and of late, naxalism did impact its culture. The identity politics in the state as well as the demand for a separate state movement such as pre-independence Odisha, Gorkhaland in Darjeeling, Bodoland in Assam has influenced its culture. Much before partition, the linguistic movement in Odisha against the Bengali officers had started. Therefore, the Bengali Jatras also influenced Odia jatra to have a separate identity of its own. Modern Bengali jatra is shaped by the rise of a new middle class in colonial times and in contemporary times with new cultural aspirations and consumption patterns. The electronic/digital media has definitely influenced the live folk entertainment media.

The regional cultural practices of Bengali were celebrated by the European modernity as Victor Van Biljit (2000) asserts.

> 'Nineteenth-century Bengal with Calcutta as the imperial metropolis of British India was the birthplace of Indian modernity. ..European science, economy, and political theory were intricately mixed up with Indian thought and

> a forward-looking Hindu ethos... In the first decades of the nineteenth century, Bengali modernity found expression largely in Hindu religious reform... All that was left to indigenous intellectuals was to express themselves in cultural production. They were never expected to put forward hard political demands... Up to the beginning of the twentieth century, the national impact of Bengali modernity was primarily cultural and eminently literary… Bengali modernity had successfully accomplished the transition from cultural theory to political practice.'

Modernity is not a discursive opposition to tradition, rather a coexistence, is effectively evident in the context of Bengal renaissance. On the one hand, adaptation and appropriation of European renaissance as a form of Westernization/modernization occurred. And on the other hand, Bengali/Indian renaissance in contrast to the European modernity, became reinterpretation of tradition. There is also a possible discussion of synthesis of East and West within the emerging discourse on nationalism (David Kopf 1969). Partha Chatterjee (1997) argues of a synthesis of two modernities or hybrid modernity ascended in favor of the critique of Western modernity. The exclusivity of European modernity as a universal condition was identified with Bengali modernity by the educated Bengalis. One needs to understand the nuances of social circumstances. 'There cannot be just one modernity irrespective of geography, time, environment or social conditions. The forms of modernity will have to vary between different countries depending upon specific circumstances and social practices ... Or, to put this another way, if there is any universally acceptable definition of modernity, it is this: that by teaching us to employ the methods of reason, universal modernity enables us to identify the forms of our own particular modernity.' (Chatterjee 1997:8-9). The synthesis of alternative or indigenous modernity with Western modernity produces a hybridized culture and this resulted in a process of cultural mixture at three interrelated levels, as asserted by Nikos Papastergiadis (2001). The manifestation

of difference as a consequence of foreign elements at one level, secondly the process by which cultural differences are neutralized or naturalized within the body of a host culture and at third level the new cultural practices that emerge in the diasporic life as a cultural mixture of both foreign and indigenous. Therefore when folk culture gets hybridized by differentiating as well as naturalizing itself from different regional and foreign cultures, the survival rate is much higher.

To conclude the discussion, the dominant discourse of surviving art forms demonstrates an inherent reflexivity which allows the addition of new elements without discarding the past. It thus ensures a coexistence of different stages in a given time and space. The Jatra performances combine narratives, dance, music and histrionic arts and entertain millions of audiences every year in Eastern and North-Eastern India. Incorporating elements from classical texts of the Vedic age as well as various folk performing forms, Jatra has evolved in a continuity through varied social conditions raising concerns of nationalism and indigeneity in its aesthetics. From the medieval Kṛṣṇa Jatra of Vaishnavism to the emergence of theatrical Jatra in colonial times performed with a dab of European modernity and nationalist concerns, it also incorporated Marxist ideology (IPTA), before it became more cinematic in the present era. Contemporary Jatra enterprises are like a cinema industry on a smaller scale. It has reinvented itself whenever it gets jeopardized by new mass media. Jatra recreates and probes morals of family and individuals in rural and urban settings. It has evolved unmistakably in a style of its own, growing into a vast and prosperous enterprise encompassing an empire of videos, music, magazines and touring stage shows which have become the collective experience of a large population. While folk traditions elsewhere are declining, as Asish Nandy puts it (1998), as well as traditional middle class bi-culturalism (with its familiarity with both Indian and Western classics), commercial cinemas create a new cultural lexicon of Indian public life and so does Jatra in

Bengal, Odisha or Assam (though defined as 'low-brow'), modernizing the rural villages in all its complexities. The West Bengal society of India definitely can be portrayed as a field of socio-political performances that immediately mirrored in its tradition of theatre in the midst of European modernity and swadeshi movement. Culture in Bengal as Sudipto Chatterjee argues has been an 'important hegemonic site of colonial authority.' Jatra demonstrated its hegemony by its very existence of more than eight centuries through its unique style of performative structure and its binding socio-political message. Therefore, the emergence of political jatras, amateur jatras, social jatras from the dominant Krishna jatras is a result of the form having reinvented itself in each of its socio-temporal framework. The journey of jatra from pre- colonial, colonial to postcolonial Bengal is a reflection of a complex interplay of political, social and economic factors, which influence the cultural and political discourse.

Notes

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