Dramatising Democracy/Democratising Drama: A Cross Sectional Analysis.

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To all unprejudiced reflection it is clear that all art is from its origin essentially
Of the nature of dialogue. All music calls to an ear not the musician’s own, all
Sculpture to an eye not the sculptor’s, architecture in addition calls to the step as
It walks in the building (Buber 1971: 25).

It goes without saying, therefore, that there is no imperative for artists or dramatic art to engage intentionally in democratic dialogue. From Buber’s point of view, whether or not dialogue is intentionally created, art is a form of “utterance” to which the audience can and does respond. However, some artists and cultural organizations do choose to present their art deliberately as a basis for democratic dialogue. They use the power of art to involve audiences at a visceral and cognitive level in the examination of issues that matter. This may not be the case always.

To begin with I distinguish between drama and theatre. Drama started when theatre became non ritualistic, when it needed dialogue, while ancient ritual, traditional theatre was a kind of monologue, drama brought in dialogue. We need dialogue because we need the right to oppose, to insist on our own opinions. In democracy, to put it simply you have to stop your monologue, you have to listen to another part, and then the other has to listen to your words again. That is the beginning of democracy - government by discussion, in which groups of people having common interests make decisions that affect their lives through debate, consultation, and voting.
From the Greek period to the present times, drama has undoubtedly served as a vehicle to carry the democratic voice of the people. Therefore, I would prefer to look into a few plays from different ages and civilizations from a macro level to analyse how these major works of world drama, which are still regularly performed today, were performed and interpreted in their historical contexts and may have contributed to discussion of democratic ethos in their own time.

**Lineage between Drama and Democracy in the Greek Period**

The play festivals of Dionysus served as a device for defining Athenian civic identity which meant exploring and confirming but also questioning what it was to be a citizen of a democracy. The framework within which Athenian drama was performed was essentially a democratic framework. W.R. Connor in a paper ‘City Dionysia and Athenian Democracy’ (1990), writes that the performance of plays were probably held at the end of 5th century after the overthrow of the tyranny of Pisistratus and the establishment of democracy under Cleisthenes. The Athenian vocabulary for ‘law’ changed in an interesting way in Cleisthenes’ days. Cleisthenes himself may have been responsible for the change, Solon’s laws were known as Thesmoi, and the word is related to the Greek verb meaning to put or place and refers to the process by which law is imposed by a law giver or other authority. Solon was good, wise man and was given power by the people, but he was still imposing laws on the people. Nomos by contrast refer to customs and traditions already present in the society rather than been imposed from high. Thus, by referring to statues as nomai rather than Thesmoi one gives law an entirely different meaning. No longer was law imposed on them by someone else. They made their own laws. Thus, Athenians were beginning to take charge of their own government.

Greek society experienced a change from tribal culture to political life, a change which brought a new economy, government, and way of thought. Drama was an integral part of this change and its development shows a progress from tribal ways of thought which were largely subconscious and mythological in pattern, to a new logical and conscious thinking. Drama was used for social criticism. As thinking became more conscious and logical, myths were secularized.
My interpretation of Athenian drama concentrates on its context and performance at Athenian festivals and sees both the festivals and the plays as products of Athenian democracy. I endorse the notion that plays questioned Athen’s democratic values.

According to the regulations of the Athenian theatre every poet who competed at the city Dionysia had to exhibit three tragedies and a satiric drama, four plays being performed in succession in the course of the same day. Goldhill emphasizes the institutional details associated with the performance of drama at Athens. I quote to catalogue the points:

the funding of the chorus or festival ; the Choregia as a specially democratic system ; the selection of judges and chorus and actors by democratic procedure ; the possibility of tribal seating and the certainty of seating according to political position in the democracy ; the procedure for getting tickets via inscription on deme roll; the dating of innovation of pre play ceremonies ; the assembly in the theatre to discuss the theatre and indeed the whole gamut of performers which are instituted by democracy , and function as sign and symptoms of democracy in action (2003:104-19).

When Thespis started drama, drama was a kind of a monologue, there was only one person, one actor. Aeschylus introduced a second actor and that was the beginning of dialogue on stage.

The emerging concept of ‘democratia’ can be found in Aeschylus’s Supplices (464) it offers us our first literary peep at the democratia in operation. Aeschylus based his Supplices on the legend of the Danaides. Danaus and Aegytus were brothers. Danaus had fifty daughters by different wives and Aegyptus fifty sons. Aegyptus sought Danuas’s fifty daughters hand in marriage to his fifty sons. These according to Turanian system were brothers and sisters and so were not intermarriageable. The fifty daughters of Danaus fled from Egypt to Argos to escape the unlawful and incestuous wedlock. They claim protection of Argive king, Pelasgus. Pelasgus repeatedly states that he must have the approval of the people (Loas or Demos) before acting and the central question at hand – whether to accept the suppliant women into the city’s protection. On a couple of occasions the chorus appeals to Pelasgus as if he had autocratic power, calling him the supreme ruler of the land and declaring that he is the polis and the people . But these are words of desperate outsider trying to persuade sympathetic listener to aid them. Pelasgus explains his actual position to them as follows: “if the polis, the community comes under pollution, let the people in common work out a cure. I myself will not make any promises
before consulting all the citizens concerning these matters” (Oates& O’Neill: 1938:37). Power lies with the people; Pelasgus plays the role of a public speaker and speaks passionately on behalf of the suppliants. He wins approval of the demos and they vote to accept the women:

And I and all those citizens whose vote
Stand thus decreed, will your protectors be

Look not to find elsewhere more loyal guard (ibid: 40).

_Supplices_ concerns the use of persuasion (_peithe_), a theme that is certainly democratic.

In _Antigone_ Sophocles uses the legend of the family of Oedipus (Antigone’s father) in order to explore social and political issues of his time. Attending the theatre was a civic and religious duty in Sophocles time. By setting his play in a time period 800 years before his own, he could explore social political issues without offending those currently in power. He uses the authoritarian rule of Creon and the strong willed Antigone to warn against the dangers of dictatorship and to highlight the status of women in Greek society. Through _Antigone_, Sophocles provides lessons on how a city should not be run.

In 429 BC, a great plague killed almost two thirds of the population of Athens, causing civil and moral unrest and testing the bounds of democracy. Warfare was also common at this time in Greece society, as the city states of Greece competed with each other for trade, commerce and artistic superiority. This unrest is reflected in the events portrayed in _Antigone_, beginning with the civil war that pits Antigone’s brother against each other. Polynoeices who invaded Thebes and seized the throne from his brother Eteocles, slew him in a mortal combat and in turn was slain. Creon became the king and forbade the burial of Polynoeices, against the pleas of her sister Ismene and her fiancé Haemon, Antigone goes to her death holding to her defiance and buries Polynoeices.

The myth of Antigone, the daughter of Oedipus, is an extraordinary dramatic legacy, worthy of exploration both for Sophocles’s consummate handling of the theatrical machine and for the political and social significance of Antigone’s actions. Sophocles sets the stage of his drama through his portrayal of Creon, without whom Antigone would have no dramatic reason to exist. Creon’s first task as king of Thebes is to prove himself
worthy of that title. He must demonstrate his respect for the city’s men of power and his ability to listen to the gods. Yet Creon’s opening words, though pleasing and rhetorically sound, represents a new battlefield in the country’s civil war. In his first public decree he denies Polynice's a proper burial. To Antigone this is an intolerable act of violence, particularly if we consider that in ancient Greece funeral rites provided women with rare opportunity to participate in civil life. In burying her brothers body Antigone defies Creon’s legitimacy and places herself in radical position to the king. The chorus of elders hesitates to enter in this conflict. They do not dare challenge the king’s authority, Antigone does dare. She challenges Creon on grounds of moral principles, citing the will of the gods, who dictates that the dead must be buried, regardless of sins accumulated during life. Antigone’s appeal to the bond of kindred transcends political allegiance and conforms to the unwritten sanctions of the gods. In other words, she frames her dedication to her kin as a religious imperative, as a kind of faith: and it is this faith which she carries and which carries her, to her end without ever compromising resolute commitments to the touted principles of state, culminates in the escalated development of tyrannical disposition and the resulting destruction of his own family. In the face of Antigone’s defiance, his sons rational but grafting advice and the prophet Tiresias forbidding at, Creon spirals down the path of corruption, the weaker of the two wills, he slides dramatically from the temperate rhetoric of his political manifesto into the realm of savage invective.

Creon now Lear like has allowed his stubborn fury to distort his judgement, upset his family and most critically betray his former pledge to protect public interests. In both personal and civic spheres, his language has denigrated into the roar of a despot who rules with an iron fist: “thou canst never marry her, on this side of the grave” (ibid: 443), he threatens Haemon. He descends into megalomania , insisting that the “man the city places authority , his orders must be obeyed , large and small, right and wrong” and “is Thebes about to tell me how to rule ? He rails “the city is the king’s – that’s the law!” By then he has defeated his own proclamation, “show me the man who rules the state” and Haemon can only point, succinctly and incriminately, that “it’s no city at all, owned by one man alone” (ibid: 443). Not surprisingly, the tragic and ironic punishment that the god’s eventually mete out for him is the suicide of his own son and wife, both of whom
die cursing his name. It is also an inconceivable political act – a solitary woman violates the king’s decree, both for the love of her brother and to claim her proper social role. And then, in an act of extreme protest, she commits suicide, initiating a chain of events that will add Creon’s wife and son to the roll of the dead.

From Sophocles point of view, Antigone’s suicide is not nihilistic or pathological act, but rather the only possible way to restore her dignity. The play then unveils, layer by layer, the ethical and ideological motivations for Antigone’s revolt. These motivations are reflected not only in Antigone’s own words but in the actions of other characters. Following her lead, Haemon, Ismene, Tiresias and the chorus itself openly oppose Creon’s law. Spurred on by Antigone’s example, their actions amount to a social awakening, a raising of consciousness that reflects the principle of Athenian democracy.

Aristophanes Lysistrata (411) is a play about democracy. The play revolves around the woman of Athens who finally tired of losing their sons on the battlefield and conspire to deny their husbands sexual favours until they make peace with Spartans although the play is light-hearted it was written out of the poets grief over the thousand Athenians who had recently lost their wives in the terrible defeat at Syracuse. The name Lysistrata means ‘deliverer from war’ loosely translated. When Aristophanes staged Lysistrata he wanted to make people laugh, he also wanted to deliver a message to theatre audiences of the fifth century Athenians that war between Athens and Sparta was an exercise in stupidity, a senseless waste of people and resources, a senseless waste of lives and money and energy.

At the beginning, the women form a mock assembly of people. Lysistrata in the role of demagogue, or charismatic unofficial leader, persuades the others to swear to a sexual boycott. The older women make war together, storming the state treasury on the Acropolis, the younger ones join them in defending it. The counter attackers are the chorus of old men. The councillor, a member of a special government board that at this time largely superseded the council of 500, enters to sort things out. He makes a resentful speech about the assembly that voted for the ill thought out Sicilian expedition, unable to cope with the women in scuffle and argument; he stomps off to tattle to his fellow board members. The voracious exchange of factional insults continues. Lysistrata works hard to
consolidate her own faction. Cinesias cannot reassure his wife as to his intention to make peace, because he regards it a decision to be made by the mass of male citizens. Fortunately, he is wrong. Meeting the Spartan herald, who is on a peace mission, he instructs him to fetch ambassadors and sets off to the council of 500 to get Athens counterparts. Under Lysistrata’s guidance, the negotiations are successful and a celebratory banquet follows.

When the women of Lysistrata strike, it is not to be taken by the audience as the fear-inducing strike of equal against equal. It is the absurd strike of weak but necessary slave against the powerful master. Women in the play are organized and rational, and their rationality opposes the irrationality of the war. Lysistrata might also be the first case of a labour union being depicted in literature. Since women were treated, again in general, as simply reproductive and child-rearing machines, they can be considered workers, though workers involved not in production but in reproduction. They organize and strike against the people who exploit their labour and the product of their labour—the sons and daughters, sons who will grow up and then go to war to die. Women are all about creating order, controlling, at the end of the play they bring society back to a sustainable condition.

**Modern play: The European context**

Ibsen’s An Enemy of the People is a masterpiece conceived in the heat of battle of democratic transition in Europe. It was published in 1882. There were parliamentary elections in Norway that year.

At the beginning of the play, Dr. Stockmann uncovers a startling truth about the springs in the town: they have been poisoned by chemical waste running off of a nearby factory and have been making some visitors sick. He thinks that he will be received in the town as a hero for uncovering this problem before things got worse in the summer as the temperature heated up, but he was wrong. His brother, Peter, claims that Tom made the evidence up and exaggerated the problem to make him look bad:

Peter: You have an ingrained tendency to take your way, at all events, and that is almost equally inadmissible in a well ordered community. The individual ought undoubtedly to acquiesce in subordinating himself to the community (Ibsen: 21)
He argues that Tom is trying to ruin the town by taking away the springs which have boosted the town’s economy significantly. Dr. Stockmann decides to take his findings to the local liberal newspaper to have them published, but Peter gets there soon after. Peter tells the paper that a new tax will be needed to pay to move the springs as Dr. Stockmann suggests. The paper removes their backing because they do not want to lose subscribers. Dr. Stockmann takes his message to the people, who regard him as an enemy for trying to destroy the greatest thing about their town. Soon, Dr. Stockmann and his family are “pilloried as the Enemy of the People” (ibid: 194). His house is vandalized, his children beat up at school, he and his daughter lose their jobs and he is evicted from his house, all done by people who were friends of theirs only days before. Dr. Stockmann is forced to make a decision, either retract his statements about the poison in the springs and save his family and reputation, or stand up against the crowd with the truth.

This play brings up some very interesting criticisms and questions about democracy. Dr. Stockmann finds himself holding an important truth about the danger of the springs and the precautions the town needs to take to safeguard themselves from disease. But “the majority” considers this information a risk and rejects it. There are many historical precedents for this play. Galileo was excommunicated from the church for saying the earth revolved around the sun. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated for his work with civil rights. Ibsen portrays Dr. Stockmann as a noble reformer who dares to fight rather than compromise his principles and claims that the “strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone” (ibid: 244).

In the play Ibsen clearly criticizes the “compact majority,” who often act foolishly in refusing to accept the truth and in blindly following their elected leaders. Although An Enemy of the People is replete with sarcastic remarks about the “compact majority”, Ibsen is not attacking the concept of democracy. Instead, he levels his criticism upon the unscrupulous leaders and their naïve followers. Because they have vested interests and secret agendas, the bureaucrats mislead and misguide the public in order to get what they want and to stay in power. Ibsen shows how such leaders make a mockery of democracy. Stockmann appropriately refers to them as social pestilence.
The Indian context

Theatre was always a form for the masses. We can say common masses. Bharata the writer of *Natyashastra*, one of the most famous treatises on theatre himself calls it *panchamveda*, a *Veda* for the common masses to communicate and inculcate some values. The mythological origin of theatre related in *Natyashastra* reveals how theatre from being restricted and reserved for certain classes and constrained to certain themes had to open up for the masses. The story goes: when the world was given over to sensual pleasures *Indra*, king of gods approached *Brahma* and asked him to create a form of diversion that could be seen as well as heard and that would be accessible to the four occupational groups (*varna*) - priests, warriors, tradesman, and peasants. Bharata and his 100 sons, along with the heavenly nymphs acted and danced in the first play called ‘*Samundramanthan*’, however malevolent spirits disturbed the dramatic action. *Brahma* summoned *Vishvakarma* to build a theatre house. Evil spirits continued to plague the actors. At last *Brahma* summoned the demons and in a mood of reconciliation, he indicated that no class of individuals was excluded from seeing it, including the demons, and that it is meant to educate and entertain. So right from the start theatre was to be democratic space meant for all class, caste and creed.

The first text I will take up from the Indian context to see negotiations between drama and democracy is Habib Tanvir’s *Charandas Chor*. It is on of the most famous and acclaimed performed text after emergency in 1975. The text recalls Indira Gandhi’s regime which had imposed emergency on the people and had tried to snatch their democratic rights. This text is a kind of dramatic representation of the situation of that time. The formation and the success of this text largely depends upon the emergency incident. So here again we are seeing the role theatre in propagating democratic ethos and values.

*Charandas’s* world is a topsy turvy world of carnivelsque reversal. Truthfulness , honesty, integrity professional efficiency are shown to belong to a thief while the policemen , the priest ,the government official (the *munim*) , the wealthy landlord and the queen are shown to be devoid of these values and virtues. The central character *Charandas* is a petty
village thief in the beginning of the play. He lives his life by duping and robbing people. But strangely he is also a man of extraordinary principles. He is kind hearted and cannot see a woman in distress. He is truthful man who keeps his word. In jest once he took certain vows before his guru who wanted him to give up stealing but instead Charandas takes four vows (i) he will never eat off a golden plate. (ii) Never mount an elephant and lead a procession (iii) won’t ever marry a queen (iv) won’t ever be the king. His guru makes him add one more vow that is (v) to give up telling lies. Amazingly he lives up to them and dies for them. He is a Robin Hood kind of a figure and has a strong sense of social justice and aids the poor against the rich. He robs sacks of rice hoarded by the village landlord to be distributed among all, the chorus hails him as: “Charandas is not a thief no way! There are so many rogues about, who do not look like thieves” (84).Charandas is further emboldened to steal the golden idol from the temple, and rob the royal coffers. The autocratic queen orders Charandas before her. Charandas refuses queen’s orders to ride on a elephant, eat from the golden plate, become the king and ultimately to marry her- as he had vowed against it all – the queen is aghast at the audacity of Charandas, a petty thief to spurn the royal command and finally when she asks Charandas to: “never reveal what has passed between us to anyone, I will be ruined! Promise me this” (111). Charandas refuses even this as he had vowed always to tell the truth. He is ordered to be persecuted. The chorus applauds Charandas as:

An ordinary thief, dear friend, who’s now famous man,

And how did he achieve this?

By telling the truth (113).

In this land of the tyrant queen evil, hypocrisy, corruption, nepotism flourishes and there comes Charandas a common thief who having taken some vows is an upright and honest man. The political parallels of rampant corruption and the tyrannous queen are obvious.

The next play I would like to discuss is Sarveshvar Daya Saksena’s Bakri (Nanny Goat, first performed in NSD in 1974). The play is a political satire. It is in six scenes, beginning with an interlude performed by a Nat and Natin. The play reveals how corrupt
politicians make a travesty of the democratic system. The nautanki style serves the authors purpose. Three aspiring politicians seize upon the idea of turning a poor village women’s nanny goat into a cult object. They dupe the villagers into believing that the goat belonged to Mahatma Gandhi and should be enshrined and worshipped as the mother goddess. The villagers build an ashram for the goat and offer donations regularly in exchange for darshan. The politicians decide to run for office on a program for bakrivad, choosing the goat’s udder (than) as their election symbol. Once they win the election, the three politicians sacrifice the goat for the victory feast. However, this corruption is resisted by a group of villagers led by a local youth, the zamindar’s son, and the original owner of the goat, the old lady, arrive at the feast at the last moment and tie up the politicians shouting ‘inqulab zindabad’ (long live the revolution’). The play ends with the defeat of the spoilers of democracy and with the democratic order restored. It ends with a positive note – a solution to counter the enemies of democracy through resistance and refusal to be duped and through solidarity in checking the politicians.

The play presents a parody of the patriotic songs ‘Jhanda uncha rahe hamare’ (let our flag stand high) as danda uncha rahe hamare (let our sticks stand high). The dialogues are mostly in prose, registers continually shift between village dialect, standard prose, poetic language and song parody. The political parody cannot be overlooked. The similarity between the nanny goat of the congress party’s symbol, the cow and the reference to Gandhi are so obvious that the satire can in no way be missed. The plays purpose is to reach out to the ordinary man (Am Admi) in villages and towns and to ultimately show that it is the awareness of the common man that can make the democracy sturdy and in a healthy state.

**Theatre Groups**

Drama is the most public literary form, at many points in history, the most immediately engaged in social change: Dublin’s Abbey theatre, Roosevelt Federal Theatre Project and Market Theatre, in India the IPTA, the Jan Natya Manch, Third Theatre, Naya Theatre M.S. Swaminathan’s ‘Voicing Silence’, Gendered theatre are among the many companies
that have played a major part in defining national identities at times of crisis and have been platforms for democratic voice and protest.

The students’ federation movement in India expanded its activities beyond the students’ movement and began calling itself IPTA after the nation wide Indian people’s theatre association that had been active from 1943 till about 1958. It was founded by stalwarts like K.A. Abbas, Ali Sardar Jafri, Safdar Hashmi among many others. A socially, politically and culturally conscious group it attacked semi fascist forces in an otherwise democratic India, it gave voice to unions, peasants, youth and women movements.

‘JANAM’ which is a Sanskrit word for ‘new birth’, it is also the acronym for Jan Natya Manch, meaning ‘People’s Theatre Front’. Since its inception in 1973 by Safdar Hashmi it has performed plays always related to specific social or political issues. It was an apolitical theatre group that effectively expressed the emotions and concerns of India’s working class and peasantry. JANAM had been punctuating landmark political events with new theatrical creations. In the political history of India 1975 emergency has been a blot, when Indira Gandhi declared Emergency arrested all her political opponents and refused to resign. JANAM got the idea to write a small skit, a street play called Kursi, Kursi, Kursi (Chair, Chair, Chair). It’s about this elected king who is sitting on a chair when a new king is elected, he gets up from the chair but the chair rises with him and no matter how hard they try to separate the king from the chair, it is impossible. Some dialogues were built around this gag (Eugene: 1989:32-47). After Indira Gandhi’s repressive regime and the Emergency debacle the Janata party came to power in India, although later they proved to be just as anti- worker and anti- peasant as the Indira Gandhi government. A particular industrialist, hired gangs of antisocial elements from the area and gave them arms and uniforms and made them guards. So when the workers went on a strike, the guards opened fire, killing six workers. It was on this episode that the play Machine was built. The short play began with five people dressed in black who enter through the circular space left open by the audience seated on the ground. Five actors represent - three workers, a guard and the owner. Together they form a machine in motion, making all kinds of hissing and peeping sounds. Then the narrator comes in and addresses the audience for a few minutes. When he is finished, the sound of the machine
becomes audible again. Suddenly the machine comes to a stop, the narrator says: “what has happened? The machine has stopped. This is first class crisis! Why has it stopped? Can someone tell me? One of the machine’s components liberates himself and says: “I have stopped it. I could not tolerate it any longer” (ibid). He is a worker. He talks about how he feels exploited by the machine. He works for the machine, for the owner and is oppressed by the guard but gets nothing in return. After he returns to his place in the machine, the owner steps forward, and then the guard, the machine starts up again as arms and legs begin to rotate. The narrator starts to speak but is suddenly interrupted by an explosion in the machine. The components fall to the ground. The three workers get up and start making demands. They want a cycle stand and a canteen. They also explain that the owner has refused their simple demands and that the guard has threatened them. They decide to go on a strike and shout: “inkalab jindabad” which means “long live revolution”! This time the guard fires on them and kills the workers. As they lie on the floor the narrator pronounces a final speech: “no matter how many bullets you pump into us, the workers are not going to be defeated. They will rise again? On this cue the workers rise and surround the terrified owner and guard in slow motion. The narrator continues: “the workers have always advanced. No one can stop them”. The end comes with the workers, the guard, the owner and the narrator forming a back to back circle, singing revolutionary song.

M.S. Swaminathan Foundations ‘Voicing Silence’ a gendered theatre’s major concerns are: Gender, culture and social activism. Three strands of their work are:

i) Developing plays sharing women's issues from a feminist perspective.

ii) Organizing collective sharing of experiences or women’s theatre festivals, bringing together cultural workers, theatre persons, social activists and NGO's.

iii) Working with different communities of women – supporting them to use theatre as a tool for self expression and empowerment.

V.Padma’s (Mangai) play Pacha Mannu (New Earth) was produced and performed by ‘Voicing Silence’on 22-30August, 1994, with ten participants – five men and five women. The workshop evolved through an exchange of personal experiences, discussions, research findings and a spirit of togetherness. What is shown in Pancha
Mannu is everyday reality with a subtle critique of the same. The play was later performed in the villages of Tamil Nadu, moving through village streets. Imagery was used in a significant way by using simple props that visually concretized the deep and personal experience of gender socialization. The oil press scene evolved out of the traditional mode of extracting oil, in this scene the girl is moulded through a list of don’ts like ‘do not walk straight’; ‘do not giggle’; ‘do not study too much’ (Mangai:2002:215-230). The scene presents the parents as the nodal agency of socialization symbolized by the centre pole and a long rope from their hands is held by a man driving the girl bent like a bullock. However to make the play appealing it is interspersed with song, dances and dialogues in different tones. The play incorporated Frierian ideology and Augustus Boal’s techniques. The flexibility of the play demanded that the actors improvise, interact and participate. It also drew the audience into discussion and the onus of decision making was rested on them.

In America the federal theatre project was a new ‘Deal Project’ to fund theatre and other artistic performance in the US during the Great Depression; it was one of the five federal projects sponsored by the Works Department administration (WPA). The FTA’s primary goal was employment of out of work artists, writers and directors with the secondary aim of entertaining poor families and creating relevant art. NTP declared intention was mounting plays that were ‘Free, Adult and uncensored’. ‘Living Newspapers’ is perhaps FTP’s most popular work. ‘Living Newspapers’ is perhaps FTP’s most popular work. ‘Living Newspapers’ were plays written by teams of researchers turned playwrights. These men and women clipped articles from newspapers about current events, often hot button issues like farm policy, syphilis testing, housing inequity etc. These newspaper clippings were adapted into plays intended to inform the audiences, often with progressive or left wing themes. Many of the notable artists of the time participated in the FTP including Susan Glaspell, Arthur Miller, Orson Welles, Elia Kazan, and Elmer Rice among others.
Theatre Forms

Certain dramaturgical texts and theatre groups as we have seen have also served democracy. The practice of theatre (its different forms) had also served the purpose of democratic ethos especially the practice of folk theatre forms which was defined by Bakhtin as ‘carnivalism’ in his *Rabellais and his World*. These types of performances which include: *Commedia dell’arte, Noh, Tamasha, Bhavai, Nautanki*. These forms of popular theatre often raises and promotes dialogue on difficult and at times politically charged issues such as disrupts traditional power hierarchies.

*Commedia dell’arte* or ‘comedy of profession’, ‘comedy of art’ means unwritten or improvised dramas and implies rather to the manner of performance than to the subject matter of the play. This peculiar species flourished in Italy in the 16th and 17th century. For Bakhtin commedia was highly dialogic in its emphasis on slang and dialects and its numerous carnival and folk elements. Bakhtin thus notes that “in the commedia del’arte, the Italian dialects were knit together with the specific types of masks of the comedy, in this respect one might even call the dell’arte a comedy of dialects (Dialogic Imagination:82).

Indian folk forms which followed the classical drama had a strongly subversive content and context. The folk theatre forms did not believe in the purity of an art form (like the Sanskrit theatre). Hence it does not follow a rigid code of discipline but is often apt to mix up several moods. The result is a happy abandon, an exhilarating freedom of expression, an extraordinary aesthetic harmony.

Among the many folk forms found in India I will briefly explicate two such forms:

1) *Bhand Jashna* the primary popular theatre form among Muslims of rural Kashmir. *Bhand Jashna* means festival. The performance begins with a ritual invocation (*poozapath*) honouring Allah. This is followed by a farcical imitation of the solemnities performed by the clown (*mashkhar*). Costumes are a mix of contemporary local and semi historical dress. A performance may take place during the day or in the evening, to the accompaniment of the musicians.
The form emphasises farce and satire. Lively plays (*pather*) are improvised primarily in the Kashmiri language, with words and phrases from Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi and Persian freely added to suit the particular political and social situation. Actors mercilessly ridicule corrupt officials, money lenders and dowry system while making fun of everyone from the simplest peasant to the most powerful political leaders. Many of the plays have semi historical settings and concern popular folk heroes to avoid the accusation of slander, but their contemporary relevance is nonetheless clear.

2) *Tamasha* is a major form of rural theatre in the state of Maharashtra. It is a rural theatre form that stress humour or extensively satirizes and pokes fun at contemporary society, often at the expense of politicians and businessmen, priests and prophets, clothing its barbs in the guise of historical or mythological stories. Evidence suggests that *Tamasha* developed in the 16th century as a bawdy entertainment both for the Mughal armies that occupied the Deccan plain and among insurgent Maratha forces determined to free their people from their oppressors.

The term *Tamasha* is a Persian word meaning ‘fun’, ‘play’, ‘entertainment’ and was probably introduced to the area by Urdu speaking soldiers of the Mughal armies. Some have suggested that the *Tamasha* developed out of the decaying remnants of two short forms of classical Sanskrit entertainment the *Prahasana* and the *Bhana*. The diverse elements found in the *Tamasha* performance indicated it eclectic borrowing. All *Tamasha* performance begins with a *Gan*, devotional song in praise of the deities, followed by *gaulan*, a dramatic segment in which Krishna and his clown attendant wittingly converse with milkmaid in their journey to the market. Songs and dances punctuate the raucous humour, following this is the *Vag*, a short dialogue play drawn from historical or mythological or local sources and with satirical incidents and broad slapstick humour.

Hence the folk techniques appear to provide the aptest instrument of communication, with its intense flexibility of form. These carnivalesque performances are quite democratically structured - the spectator becomes the spect/actor; audience participation on a universal scale has been the hallmark of such performances. It creates a democratic space.
Conclusion

Drama is a way of opposing. Nepotism, despotism, authoritarianism, corruption and other threats to democratic ethos and personal liberty are critiqued / lashed at and mirrored in the dialogue of drama. This paper has attempted to mark out how since the time of Aeschylus democracy has been developing drama and drama has been supporting democracy.

No portion of literature is connected by closer or more numerous ties with the present condition of society than the drama. Restrictive forces have always opposed theatre , Puritanism in England and the new colonies , clericalism in Spain , self perpetuating juntas , proletariat dictatorships , tyrannies of the right , the apostolic church , kings by divine rights at one time or the other all fought the theatre as unclean, untrustworthy , disobedient or demoralising. Max Beerbohn called actors impersonators, impersonating gods and demons and heroes. Solon, the law giver in Athens objected to impersonating because he regarded them as deception. Century’s later church also had strong doubts. Both were on the right track for the wrong reasons. Impersonating in a theatre are simulations, no doubt of that. But we can hardly call it deception. Brilliantly encompassed by great performance, they have a shattering reality that transcends what we imagine of reality. Impersonation on stage, at their best can be devastating revelation of truth. Solon was wise, and he knew that the stage could be the enemy of decorum and unquestioning submission. The fine arts are reflective instruments for promoting the best interests of men. It is the duty of every good citizen to encourage their cultivation. Theatre is a powerful engine well adapted to the improvement of man, and that it only wants to make directing hand of an enlightened society to make it the pure source of civilisation and virtue.

We all know that drama appeals to man as an individual and as a social animal, It satisfies his need to think and feel privately and yet to be a part of a group. In our democratic society, which earnestly propagates the philosophy, that good life must be placed within the reach of all; there is an understandable urgency to make arts the joy of every man/woman.
Works Cited


