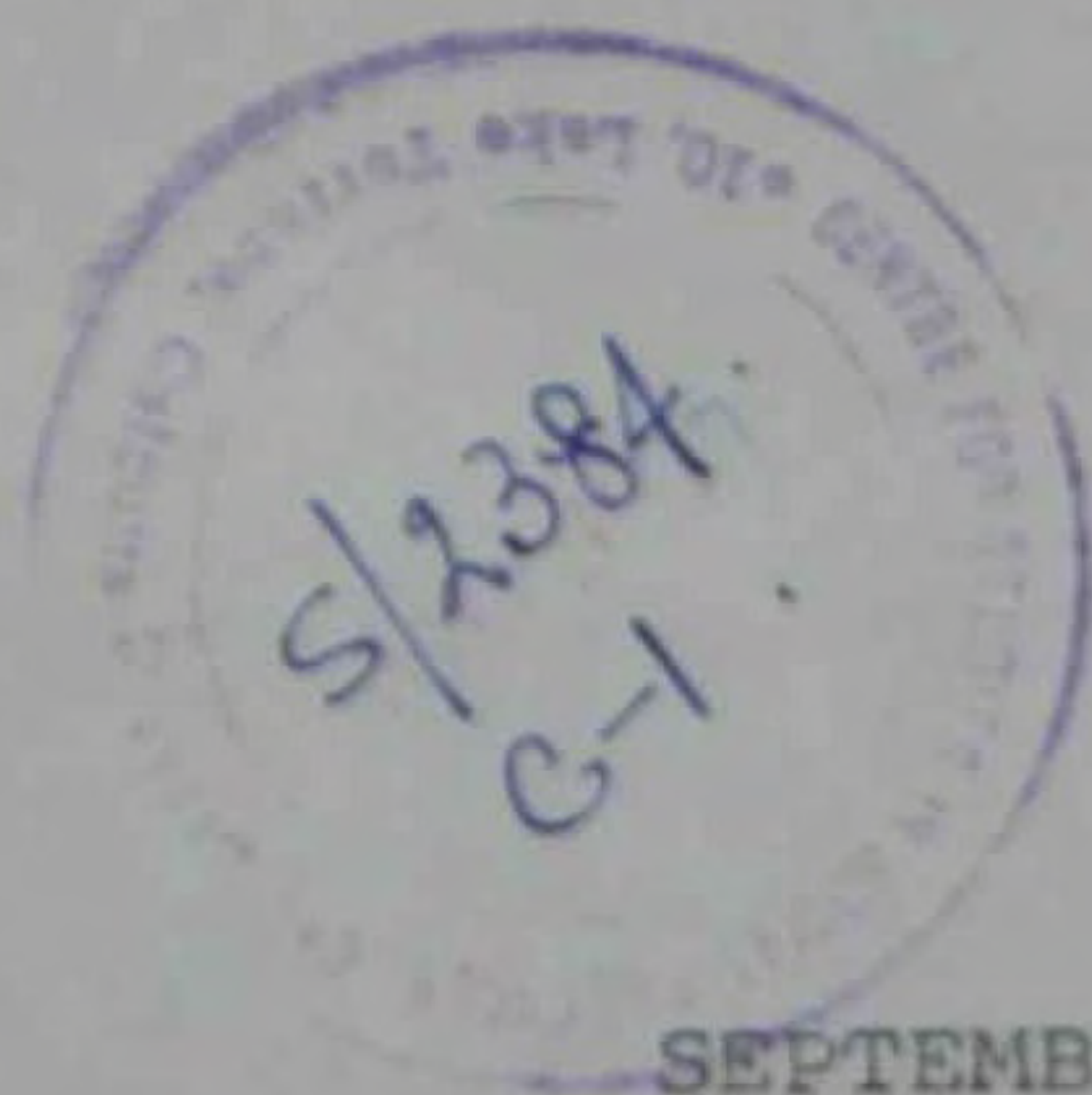


Occasional Paper No.: 106

REPRESENTATION AND CLASS POLITICS IN
THE THEATRE OF UTPAL DUTT

Himani Bannerji



SEPTEMBER 1988

CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES, CALCUTTA
10, LAKE TERRACE,
CALCUTTA-700 029.

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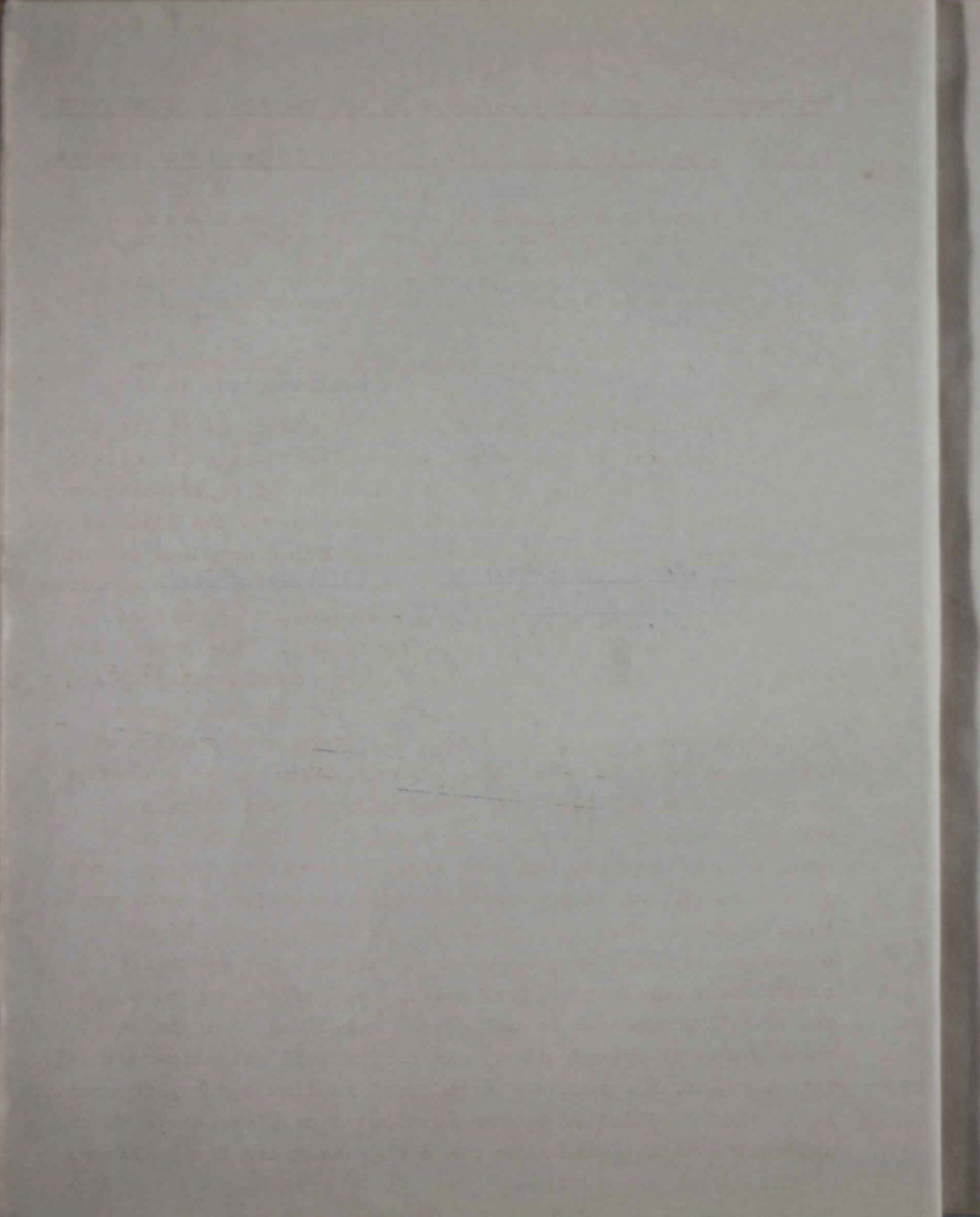
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ERRATA

- p.2, sixteenth line from above, 'contents' should be 'connects'.
- p.9, tenth line from above 'as' should be 'we'.
- p.77, first line from above include the word 'be' between 'to' and 'more'.
- p.88, in footnote no.66 the title of D. Das's book is Marxbadi Sahitya Bitarka not Marxbadi Sahitya Bishayak Baktrita as given.



Representation and class politics in the theatre of Utpal Dutt

Part I : Utpal Dutt - the context and the Scope of his theatre.

For time flows on, and if it did not it would be a poor lookout for those who have no golden tables to sit at. Methods wear out, stimuli fail. New problems loom up and demand new techniques. Reality alters; to represent it the means of representation must alter too.

Bertolt Brecht, 'The Popular and the Realistic'.

When theatre becomes a matter of conscious political intervention, rather than a spontaneous expression of politics and class, complexities around the question of representation become crucial. Theatre now has to move beyond the level of an aesthetic and coherent construct, to being accountable and explanatory (not only expressive) of the reality which requires intervention. This speaks of a politicization of ways of knowing and seeing, as well as of depicting. This argues for a transparency between methodological and representational terms of realism and socialism. Their enterprises become interchangeable, and we note that the problem of realism of defining reality and depicting or describing it, is not unique to artists but one that all socialist/communist activists share in common. It is only to the extent that they can analyze and penetrate into the existing social relations and organization, that they are successful in making a meaningful intervention. Marx and Engels for instance speak of a socialism as being utopian or scientific, truly socialist rather than merely political (i.e., bourgeois), depending on the socially grounded nature of the political analysis and their forms of organization. In the case of artistic-cultural intervention, however, the problem of realism and representation is further complicated by the particular complex nature of the productive mediations. The class character and the political

adequacy of a play is not only expressed by the analytical or ideological intention of the playwright/director but the actual politics that can only be arrived at from the concrete work of art itself. The stated theoretical or ideological position may surround and abet it, but it is the actual play, or the theatre project as a whole, which will uncover the actual class character and politics of the project. Thus the study of any political theatre must attend to the formal representational or mediational apparatus of the theatre along with the stated or suggested epistemological, methodological and ideological standpoints. In the light of the political importance of aesthetic realism the intention of this paper is to examine the realization process of an actual theatrical project of a very important member of the present day political theatre in West Bengal, namely Utpal Dutt. But before doing that let us briefly review the period that contents him to IPTA's last national convention.

In order to context our present day political theatre we have to begin with a brief reminder about the political project of the Indian Peoples Theatre Association (IPTA). A look at IPTA's history shows how as the contradictions inherent in the liberal nationalist independence of India became apparent after 1947, the accumulated contradictions within the communist movement intensified as well.¹ The divergent political tendencies, cultural perspectives and practices that were suspended in the loose framework of "progressivism", due to the necessity of a united front in the context of national independence, no longer held. The CPI and its cultural outreach the IPTA fragmented around the same time riven by intricately related and similar problems. 1956 was the year of the last national convention of IPTA, and the CPI split into

two in 1964 - but for years before the split the party was in a state of political paralysis due to inner struggles. So far neither has a united Communist Party, or a nationally united Marxist or communist theatre movement emerged in India. The question that we are confronted with is what this fracturing of IPTA did to the tradition of political theatre in West Bengal which had securely established itself among the urban middle class intelligentsia. How did the new playwrights and directors fare in a situation where some worked without the guidance of a unified or any kind of communist party and others worked in cooperation with any one (CPI, CPI(M), CP(M-L) of them ?

The situation following the national dissolution of the IPTA was open though lacking in leadership. Some of the theatre groups came directly out of the different communist parties (CPI, CPI(M) eventually), or entered into an active relationship with them while remaining independently Marxist, or others demonstrated considerable antagonism towards them, as for example the "third theatre" or "living theatre" groups which consolidated in the mid and late '70s. And yet these ~~xx~~ theatres do not as a whole consider themselves as "art for art's" or as experimental or entertainment theatre; their self-image is one of substantial political activism. But recently the non-commercial or amateur theatre world of Calcutta/West Bengal has once more drawn together. Though not a national enterprise such as IPTA, a new provincial theatre producers federation on a similar principle of progress and democratic form has come into being along with the continuation of a Bengal version of IPTA. The former organization is of some eighty big and small groups, mainly operating out of Calcutta and its surrounding suburbs, decided to federate

themselves in the summer of 1979, under the name The Group Theatre Federation. The reasons for forming the Federation were put forward by Jacchan Dastidar, the secretary of the organization since 1979, in the journal Theatre Bulletin. According to Dastidar :

For many long decades the group theatres were fulfilling their social responsibilities through their theatre productions. Increasingly economic pressures in the country, continuous increase in the rental of stages, increase in the price of advertisements in local daily newspapers, the increase in the price of miscellaneous objects and facilities necessary for theatre production, all forced the theatre groups to go through an unbearable existence. But even so these theatre groups, in their isolation, carried on their individual initiatives. This is the situation which forced them to realize that perhaps they would not be able to exist for too long in this way. 'The Group Theatre Federation' is a result of this realization.²

(my translation)

Easily comparable to the IPTA manifesto in its catholicity of taste and politics, the manifesto of the Group Theatre Federation is another attempt at forming a common platform for "progressive" playwrights. The Federation has a place for all theatre groups which are non-commercial or amateur, except those which, according to the manifesto, are busy

... trying to keep alive life-denying customs and superstitions, trying to stimulate lust and sensuality, attempting to vindicate self-centred and pessimistic fantasies, or propagandizing for the maintenance of the status quo of the present society, which is contaminated by religious blindness, bigotry, racism and communalism, as well as those who not only reject the demand for decent human existence but actively oppose it through their art - except for these groups, all others can become members of this Federation.³

(my translation)

One other similarity exists between this progressive and humanist attempt and IPTA's, which is that also in the case of the Federation the founding inspiration came from a communist party. The encouragement and initiative came from the CPI(M)'s cultural policy, its activists front, and this has important implications for theatre groups in West Bengal, since the Left Front government of West Bengal has a CPI(M) leadership. This connection with the state and the governing party has been both an added attraction for joining the Federation, as well as cause for criticism of the government for practicing favoritism. But the Federation, which openly acknowledges this relationship to the state, does not apologize for it and points out the active attempts by the Left Front Government to patronize cultural activities. Theatre Bulletin published a statement to this effect :

It is the same Left Front Government which has formed, for the first time [in West Bengal], an advisory committee which holds a leadership position among the theatre groups. What they [the Left Front] have already achieved, or may achieve in the future, will be witnessed by the common people of the province. But at least the Left Front is thinking about groups like us. They recognize our contribution. Until now it was after all a non-left wing government which was in charge of the state of West Bengal, but they never thought about us or ever felt the necessity of even talking with us.⁴

(my translation)

But in spite of frequent accusations by the non or anti-CPI-M participants of favoritism regarding funding or the manipulating of the cultural scene of West Bengal by the CPI(M) party-government, it becomes apparent from the advertisements in the theatre magazines, newspapers, different publications and the continuous proliferation of theatre groups in all corners of Calcutta, that there is no real cultural commissariat

being maintained by the state, or the Party. What there is, is an attempt to promote a theatre ideology from an established communist perspective which has a long standing history in Bengal/India. This general ambience is not only CPI(M) produced pervade also a huge amount of theatre produced by groups which are not CPI(M)-affiliated and even anti-CPI(M).

In this broad theatre spectrum interest ranges from a directly political theatre of class struggle, to ones of populism, civil liberties, and formal experimentalism. New streams of theatre philosophies and forms were feeding into this area. Along with the old IPTA tradition of socialist realism and revolutionary romanticism learnt from the U.S.S.R., there has developed a cumulative history of fascination with old classics such as Ibsen and Chekov, existentialism and the theatre of the absurd - of both Sartre and Beckett - with the neo-realism of Pinter, Pirandello's symbolist theatre, along with the 'epic' and 'total' theatre of Brecht and Piscator. These provided and still do the main resources for adaptation and translation. This is also an interest in the local form of jatra missing as a tradition in Bengal IPTA, though in its theaterized, that is urbanized and commercial form. Different "folk" conventions have also minimally influenced the new political theatre. The break-up of IPTA, then, did not put an end to a development of Bengal's progressive theatre but its different tendencies began to develop relatively separately from each other.⁵

Inspite of the break-up of IPTA and the CPI some other things also continued to be the same. Not only do the cultural and political producers continue to come from the same class background, but the general predisposition to Europeanization that was put in place in the 19th century, and supplied a

vital ingredient of the subjective consciousness of the middle class throughout the colonial period, continued as well. The theatrical traditions, that is, the representational options, also continued to be the same, with some additions from the post-second world war era of Europe and the United States. Bourgeois cultural and theatre theories and practices, Bengali and western (from the 19th century onwards), whose presence we detected in IPTA, still remain attractive and influential. The importance of older socialist/communist theatres of Europe and the Soviet Union is not diminished either as a result of the search for a proper typologically "communist" theatre. Socialist realism still continues to be influential, particularly among those who aim towards a direct theatre of class struggle under the auspices of any of the communist parties and can assume the republic of Gananatya or people's theatre.

In this effervescence of theatre activities among the Bengali middle classes living in Calcutta (reminiscent in scope, intensity, and splits of the last half of the 19th century), it is possible to discern four political tendencies. It must also be remembered however that they overlap and that there is a degree of nebulosity about them, since the boundaries between the formal or even the ideological conventions are by no means established. Roughly they could be characterized follows :

(a) A "progressive" theatre -- interested in specific issues, for example, the social situation of women, from a "humanist" standpoint. Playwrights of this type are not interested in thinking in terms of class or revolution, at least many of them, and directly. They also show an interest in seeing theatre as "art" rather than a site or tool for politics.

(b) A theatre of class struggle -- where there is an explicit interest in promoting a specifically proletarian revolution and class struggle. This may involve an engagement with immediate international, national or local politics, and a willingness to work co-operatively with any of the organized or explicitly formulated communist parties, i.e. CPI, CPI(M) and CPI(ML). There is also an interest in contexting their theatre to classical revolutionary theories -- namely those of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao.

(c) A theatre with an explicit interest in the themes, class and class struggle, but with more of an exploratory and depictive nature rather than in the culmination in a revolution. It is not associated in any direct way with party politics in West Bengal/India, nor directly or canonically with the works of major communist thinkers, but sensitized by the existence of communist parties, movements and a general body of literature on class and class struggle.

(d) A utopian theatre of "humanism" -- where themes of alienation (psychological) and domination take the place of themes of class. Relying on spontaneity and moral change (or change of heart), this theatre concentrates its attack on technology, market and money and advocates a return to the "village society" and assumes the possibility of a resurrection of the pristine social and mental state. It displays a partial akinness to Gandhian philosophy.

Among these many tendencies our interest lies in exploring the works of Utpal Dutta, whom we place in the tradition of the 2nd type of (directly political) theatre of revolutionally (proletarian) class struggle, and our particular emphasis is on his attempts to create a theory and practice of an epic-mythic project, a project that he sees as the goal of

his theatre work. In this exploratory exercise we must concentrate on how he, in the many roles of playwright, director, actor and critic, negotiates the different representation and options implied in the theatre through IFTA and after, and what his attempts mean in terms of class consciousness and representational politics of Bengali middle class communists. Our purpose is to take up the theme of representation and class struggle and to bare the class character of Utpal's theatre projects. From the "realism" of his formal apparatus and the class implications of their cultural theories as will come to some conclusions not only regarding the class character of a specific theatre project, but also of political theatre in West Bengal. This will also entail an examination of this playwright-director's use of local and foreign theatre traditions and cultural theories as well as an examination of the epistemological and ideological underpinnings.

Utpal Dutt

"I came to the conclusion that in a colonial country a pure intellectual is a pure coward".

Utpal Dutt, Towards a Revolutionary Theatre.

Utpal Dutt as he stands now with his People's Little Theatre Group is the largest figure on the Bengali state -- political or otherwise. His work, as in the case of all other theatre producers, is wholly in Bengali. Yet it was not always so. Utpal Dutt's theatre trajectory is that of all of India's middle class liberal, westernized intellectuals. It moves from colonialism to nationalism, from English to Bengali, from Europe to India, and in a manner of speaking, from liberalism to communism. This transformation is a matter of the development of a conscious political choice -- often remaining within bourgeois nationalism with a tangential movement towards an anti-imperialism with clearly nationalist traces.

During mid-forties, Utpal Dutt was a student in St. Xavier's, a Jesuit English-medium college. There he became involved in theatrical production through a professor, Father Weaver, who was once in the Irish Abbey Theatre. Utpal learnt Shakespeare from him. It was not Father Weaver, however, but rather Geoffrey Kendal, who while touring India with the Old Vic company (1947-53) gave him his basic training and theatre canon, which was centred around Shakespeare. Whether as a young man learning the craft of bourgeois English theatre from Geoffrey Kendal, Utpal Dutt ever fantasized about becoming an "artist" and the universal nature of art/theatre, is not known to us. But by all accounts, he did not walk the boards for long before he decided on the political immediacy of theatre. According to him :

In 1948 the communist party became illegal. Arrests, torture and gangsterism went on recklessly, and the complacent (secure) pursuit of theatre by the Little Theatre Group progressively began to seem ridiculous -- a pointless hypocrisy. In June of 1948 we published a strong political tract in the programme notes of Romeo and Juliet. The article began with Gorky's letter to Stanislavsky and ended in a protest against the choking into silence of the voice of IPTA. We also added such information in our article as recently devastated German fascism also began its march by attacking theatre. And later it is this article that kept on mocking us all the time. Miriam Stark was the lead actress of our group in those days -- Rebecca of the film Michael. That forthright, straight-speaking woman said : 'If we really believe in what we have written, then why are we acting in one classic after another, and for whom?'

As a result there was a production of Julius Caesar in modern costume :

By modern we mean in the regalia of Italian fascism without changing a single word Shakespeare's play became a highly contemporary play. I was able to see a dictator in Caesar who towered above his time and nation. When our Caesar (Ellis Abraham) got up to give his speech in a felt hat, and the senators in red and black greeted him with a resounding "heil", when the democratic Brutus(I) began to vacillate, faced with the inevitable bloodshed, when the extremist Cassius (Pratap) explained with his infallible logic the necessity of a bloody clash, and the cruel, conniving and cunning Anthony, like any great fascist orator, mislead the masses, the play became a vast mirror of the contemporary world.⁸

This, even before he discovered that he could write plays, is the beginning of Utpal's life as a participant in political theatre. It was a response not to any abstract ideas of politics -- but to the dark times of Indian independence, which was born in communal massacres, exodus, homelessness, partition of the country and communist repression. Utpal Dutt himself describes the response and the time for us.

Anger thrashed around the rib cage in impotent frustration at the news of shooting of the political prisoners [of the CPI and of the Tebhaga movement], women murdered in Kakdwip, the earth reddened in Nayanpur, police firing in the IPTA performance at Dibrugar, reckless firing in the maidan and Hazra Park, firing on women's demonstration in Bow Bazar -- and why is Little Theatre silent?⁹

From 1953 Utpal abandoned the practices of putting on plays in English, since the question of who the audience was became a crucial one. No matter how political a play may be -- the very fact that it is in English, he felt, kills the politics of the play, since it must be played to an audience which is upper class and generally right-wing. Utpal therefore looked to Bengali and European classics and sought out primarily a Bengali speaking audience. Michael Madhusudan Dutt to

Rabindranath Tagore from Bengal, and Shakespeare, Gorky, Brecht, Gogol, etc., "progressive" classics of all sorts translated and adapted from abroad, provided him with "progressive material" for building a theatre for raising popular consciousness.¹⁰

His interest in classics was matched by his interest in a topical theatre for immediate consumption, namely "propaganda and agitation". He firmly believed that these two types of theatre, i.e., classics and propaganda, are reconcilable in a fuller political theatre aesthetics. His involvement with propaganda and agitprop, started in 1950. Invited to perform for IPTA in 1950, he joined the organization for 10 months at the Central Calcutta branch and came under the influence of Panu Pal, a committed IPTA activist, who was then mounting a street play, Chargesheet, for the release of communist prisoners from the jails of independent India. Utpal sees this period as that of his political education both for theatre and for the election of 1952, which the CPI was allowed to participate in. Utpal's interest in the propaganda form continued beyond this period, through the rest of his life :

I have written and played two dozen such plays /propaganda 7, even developing them to full 3 hour performances, and have revelled in them as an artist, not only as a political being. Critics there are who have contemptuously spurned these efforts as rude political propaganda and have written extensively on my naivete. I do not think that theatre can accommodate a thoroughly cynical, exhausted, mental octogenarian!1

Informational and analytical of political issues at hand, these plays bare the oppression of the Indian people, and attempt direct their political choice towards the different communist parties, particularly the CPI(M) since the early 70s. Utpal Dutt has also responded outside of the agit-prop framework to

the intensive repression by the Indian state against progressive and communist activists, particularly in the state of West Bengal. Since 1967, that is, the beginning of United Front electoral victory, and the rise of a Maoist movement (Naxalite), West Bengal experienced much terror from the state and its ruling party, Congress (M). These brutalities culminated in the Emergency of 1975-76.¹² These are the times which are described, analyzed and responded to by plays such as Barricade, Ebar Rajar Pala (Enter the king), Rifle, Dushapner Nagari (Nightmare City), among many others.¹³

It is certainly the legacy of IPTA which enabled Utpal to connect the work of fundamental social transformation and involvement with communist politics, with that of theatre. The short agit-prop plays constitute an immediate, practical and pragmatic dimension of his extensive and varied range of political theatre. They are connected to a specific communist party's strategies and tactics, and respond to the contemporary Indian and international political scenes. Here much of the attention is directed to informing and educating both in terms of facts and taking a stand a part in organized party politics. An aesthetics of political immediacy justifies both the form and the content of this theatre -- it is the aesthetics of propaganda, agitation and direct activism.

But along with this practical and pragmatic approach, there is a broader political project in Utpal Dutt's theatre. It is in no sense propagandist, but an epistemological one, aimed towards reorienting the audience to the enduring, even "universal truth" about history, in terms of class struggle, class consciousness and national identity. This is the level with its own aesthetic of representation, which Rustam Bharucha misses, when like many other anti-communist critics he is

driven into saying that Dutt merely "harangues his audience, and hypnotizes them with slogans, songs, rhetoric, and spectacular stage devices".¹⁴ This assessment is shallow, and involves a knee-jerk response to an activist theatre of the organized left and is applicable only, if at all, to the practical aspect of Utpal's theatre, rather than to his larger project of the creation of politically philosophical revolutionary theatre. It is in relation to this larger historic/epic-mystic project, we will see, that Utpal Dutt rejects the very slogan-mongering and formula politics and propaganda theatre to which Bharucha reduces his work. Bharucha, had he known Bengali well, and read the full opus of Dutt's theatre criticism in Bengali, might have found ideas and sentiments that are surprisingly contradictory to those he attributes to Dutt. In a book called Japenda Japen Ja (Meditations and Pursuations of Brother Japen), a dialogical, dramatic discussion on theatre and culture he ridicules the formulaic political theatre of IPTA tradition.¹⁵ As he puts it

The architect of the new world Mao-tse-tung tried hard to humanize bulls like you. In his Yen-an speech he said "get the content of your theatre from the present day struggles, but while writing use the examples of the ancient classics". What does that mean? It doesn't mean that you'll put an English character and a Bengali peasant on stage and show them fighting. What do your plays have in them? First a white man or a landlord takes a whip and beats the daylight out of a bunch of peasants. They get a sight of heaven, fall down, scream, groan -- "once we had rice in every home and now the land-lord's taken it all!" Then comes the communist -- the vessel of all virtues, a good boy, who has done all his homework. He neither has any doubt, nor weakness, nor conflicts. Such a saint comes along and raises the consciousness of the peasants -- they, having seen the light, go and beat up the landlord -- curtain. Here endeth the theatre of people's theatre association. This is your formula.¹⁶

Though this is not to say that Utpal Dutt does not use just this very formula, if it serves his immediate purpose, it also indicates his full awareness of its limitations. He has a much more ambitious political theatre in mind.

This larger and his more ambitious project is an epic project regarding history. This involves the creation of revolutionary myths, through an epic mode. This is the central focus of our discussion in characterising the politics of his theatre. The following lines give us a sense of how he envisions his work in this direction :

From the very beginning of my theatre-work we have tried to put revolution in a historical perspective. Studying social phenomena in isolation, assuming each phase of development as a whole, that is, substituting the general with the particular, is a universal bourgeois vice, which has infected "progressive" thinking as well.¹⁷

Historical amnesia, according to Utpal, created by the ideological hegemony of the local and foreign ruling classes, has deprived the Bengali/Indian people of their historical, political and cultural identity. The work of political theatre is "... to spread hatred, to preach hatred, to harp on hatred endlessly ... for the imperialist, the capitalist, for the primeval beast called the feudal lord ..."¹⁸. In order to do this we must re-learn our history. The truth about history is simple for him -- of militant class and anti-colonial struggles. According to Utpal, to counter the propaganda of peace, which is actually an insidious Gandhian politics of hate, political theatre must "... expose the mendacious theories of peace as a trick of the ruling classes to dope the masses with masses with opium ..."¹⁹ "Our task" is to fight this great historical lie and to point out that class rule in India has masqueraded in the Gandhian era with a face of peace and forgiveness.

This has mislead the people of India :

We have been sickened no end by endless nonsense about peace and forgiveness ... about Gandhi and the so-called Indian tradition of peace ... But history tells us that India has staged some of the biggest genocides the world has ever seen.²⁰

The masked violence of the ruling class must be countered by the open revolutionary violence of the people - and for this they must know the path travelled by others before them. The work of Utpal Dutt and the People's Little Theatre then is :

... to re-affirm the violent history of India, to re-affirm the martial tradition of its people, to re-count again and again the heroic tales of grand rebels and martyrs.²¹

Utpal Dutt proceeds to fulfill his task by recounting "moments" of confrontation between two opposing political forces. In this way he hopes to crystalize the class truths of history through what he calls "myths". The "myths" both embody and reveal the basic historical law, i.e., the law of class struggle, embedded in the historical events. They are what he calls "myths of revolution", or myths of "violence". They are heroic moments of national and international armed resistance. To these are added myths of national culture and culture heroes.

The historic mythic project of Utpal can be classified into a few types. To begin with we have plays that are myths of armed resistance on a nationalist basis, with an underpinning of nationalism overriding the theme of class. These are accompanied by the mythification of communist revolution, on an international scale. They include plays on the Russian revolution, Vietnam, China, Cuba, etc., together with revolutionary insurrections in India where the Communist Party had a central role.

Let us briefly discuss a few of these plays to get a sense of the myths he tries to create. Titumir, based on the Farazi uprisings of the 1830s, is one example. This uprising was ruthlessly suppressed by the British administration with the collaboration of their client landlords of the Permanent Settlement in Bengal. Due to their vested interest in the countryside they resented the uprising from among the peasantry, and their muslim religious discourse. The Bengali middle class reporting on this struggle in the Calcutta media was extremely negative. Utpal Dutt sought to retrieve this rebellion and its hero Titumir in terms of an anti-colonial, anti-feudal struggle, expressing the revolutionary aspirations of the people of India. Titumir, the martyred peasant leader, became a pre-figuration of a future hero of communist revolution.

In Tota (The Bullet), or its other version Mahabidroh (The Great Rebellion), we have the defeat of India, through the suppression of the Great Rebellion of 1857. In this play also class is less central since the aristocrats and the military leaders join hands with the common people - 'sepoys' (soldiers), landless/poor peasants and dispossessed craftsmen - to rid India of the British through an armed struggle. Both the struggle and the defeat are portrayed as heroically tragic. This history of armed struggle is an implicit comment on the actual independence achieved by India, which was not genuinely popular or anti-imperialist. This anger at the nature of Indian independence and regret about the communist party's inability to hegemonize nationalist movement are a constant presence in Utpal Dutt's work - both critical and dramatic.

The other notable play in the context of a historical evocation of national politics is Kallol (The Sound of Waves), based on the mutiny in the Royal Indian Navy (1946). This

play is also anti-colonial and depicts the heroism of the Indian people, particularly through two figures of both sexes, who assume a mythic or a more-than-life-size proportion. Shardul Singh, a gunner of the rebel ship Khyber, and his mother Krishna Bai, go beyond their gendered selves to embody the reason and the spirit of the struggle. Indeed, the ship Khyber in its intransigence is something like the battleship Potemkin in its refusal to surrender.

Among the international historical plays the two plays on the Russian revolution and Vietnam are the most well known. The two former ones on Lenin and Stalin are quite popular in Bengal. This popularity is based mainly on India's long familiarity with both figures and the symbolic status the Russian revolution already holds in India from the time of its occurrence. In these complex plays Utpal simultaneously shows a past victory of socialism in the Soviet Union as a mirror for the present times of bourgeois hegemonic crisis in India. In Lenin Kothai ? (Where is Lenin ?) the period depicted is between July and October of 1917. It marks the underground phase of Lenin during the Kerensky-Menshevik government. The main theme of this play is the betrayal of Lenin by the Mensheviks, raising questions regarding communist alliances with bourgeois reformist or communist revisionist parties. In Stalin 1934 he also takes a short period leading up to the turning point when Stalin emerges as the figure that we later hear of, countering "white terror" by "red terror". In these two plays historicization and political generalizations take place simultaneously. Whereas each period is presented in great detail - lifting for the viewer a few pages out of the history of the Soviet Union, creating dialogue from speeches, congress reports, or texts such as Lenin's State and Revolution -- the plays also signal far beyond themselves to the different stages and processes of

a revolutionary movement of the working classes everywhere. Lenin and Stalin are Utpal's mythic but personable heroes, particularly Stalin, who is an embodiment of endurance, reason and superhuman sacrifice, driven to a necessary "red terror" through a particular historical conjuncture.²²

During the Emergency, when direct political criticism became impossible, these historical-political events from abroad offered an Aesopian device for depicting national problems. Lenin Kothai ? for example is full of contemporary Indian references. An Indian audience immediately recognizes in it the government of Indira Gandhi, and the alliance between Congress(I) and other political parties. The Menshevik collusion with Kerensky has a direct parallel with the support offered to Congress (I) by the pro-Soviet, pro-national bourgeoisie CPI, while the Kerensky cabinet echoes with the proceedings in the Indian cabinet.²³ The play was written and performed in this contemporary spirit and understood as such by the audience. Barricade, another play written and produced during the Emergency, was based on an incident during the Reichstag fire in Berlin 1933 - as noted in a journal of the time called Unseres-trasse. This play again was not only a record of the rise of Nazism in Germany, but on the rise of a type of fascism (according to Utpal Dutt) in India itself. Its plot is similar to a detective story in which an anti-hero type of character, a naive and honest journalist - a firm believer in the promises of liberal democracy -- tries to unravel the mystery of the murder of a major German humanist and philanthropist. This murder had been attributed by the German state to the communists and consequently arrests, detentions and a general smashing of all communist organizations were in full swing. This reporter, of an once-renowned liberal newspaper, finally manages to piece together the puzzle and discloses the nazis as the murderers.

But this is only the surface of the play. For a Bengali audience however of the mid-70s, or anyone informed about Congress (I) atrocities in West Bengal during the 1960s and 1970s, there was a very Bengali story hidden within it. It is about the murder of an old and respected liberal progressive political figure -- Hemanta Basu during the pre-emergency era. It too was blamed on the CPI(M) by the Congress(I) and other right-wing parties.²⁴ All bourgeois newspapers of Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi advertized it as one more instance of CPI(M) -- i.e., communist-violence, and an "end of law and order" in the communist-governed state of West Bengal. This lead to a veritable witch hunt, murders, bombings on CPI(M) offices, etc., by Youth Congress cadres and sympathizers.²⁵ The collaboration of the mainstream media was also proved by the fact that they totally ignored the subsequent verdict of the courts which declared the innocence of the CPI(M) cadres. It was proved to be a frame-up done by the Congress(I). The Bengali audience saw in this play both an Indian and a German story. The characterization of the newspaper was unmistakably that of the largest Bengali daily, Anandabazar Patrika. The relationship between the editor of this paper and the Congress(I) establishment, and its role in communist bashing in Bengal, was familiar to all.

These plays which seek to create myths of armed struggle which are national in character, and sometimes, as with Ajeva Vietnam (Invincible Vietnam), anti-imperialist, are complemented by plays which seek to create revolutionary myths based on a national and anti-colonial culture -- constructing revolutionary art. We will examine two of these plays in some detail. They are in no way directly political but rather explore the formation of cultural ideological structures in the context of

the 19th century colonial Bengal. In particular Utpal Dutt concentrates on the weakening and the obscuring of the Bengali cultural identity vis-a-vis the colonial impact. This necessity of developing an authentic (not original) national cultural identity is posed in terms of the existence of a politics and intellectual life which is the result of the overall hegemonizing effects of colonialism. Acts of cultural reconstruction seen from this perspective become political acts of resistance, and they imply the necessity of the retrieval of the past.

The mythic figure and the revolutionary aesthetic are most developed in Tiner Talwar (The Tin Sword) and Daraon Pathikbar (Stay Passerby). Utpal Dutt's mythic attempts are concentrated primarily on the 19th century polymathic figure of the poet-dramatist Michael Madhushudan Dutta, who embodied a liberal romantic socio-cultural development among the new Bengali intelligentsia. For Utpal, he archetypically embodied character traits to be found among the young and new intelligentsia of Bengal. The biographical trajectory of the hero, not unlike Utpal's or other middle class intellectuals is constructed in terms of his initial loss of identity in face of the new colonial bourgeois culture and a subsequent resistance to it through a critical revaluation process and a new aesthetic project. Utpal Dutt recognized the possible revolutionary implication of such a trajectory and synthesized from it the figure of an artist who he saw as rebelling against cultural imperialism. Since imperialism, cultural and otherwise, is by no means over, this play Daraon Pathikbar is meant to give the self-estranged, de-historicized intelligentsia a chance to rethink its own role in developing a national consciousness and a class politics.²⁶

The historical accuracy of this play has been questioned. But the issue of historical accuracy is pointless here, because the culture hero Madhushudan is really less a person than an essential "political truth" that Utpal Dutt constructed. This is the mythical use of history, with a view to capturing the cultural and political developments of Madhushudan's time and of ours. For this purpose, Madhushudan's own life is subordinated to a political representational necessity. Madhushudan, and to a smaller degree, the great educationalist and agitator for women's rights, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, are mirrors in which the Bengali intelligentsia is invited to see its own face. Utpal Dutt gives them to us as our culture heroes and their achievements become the "true myth" of nationalist culture.

The two plays also contains a struggle between a bourgeois colonialist and a revolutionary aesthetic. They promote a spirit of political resistance which is meant to transform bourgeois theatre into a political weapon/tool. The question regarding the relationship between politics and theatre that haunts Utpal from the beginning of his career groups towards a concrete answer in such plays as Daraon Pathikbar, Tiner Talwar or Ajker Shajahan. It is implied that political revolutions necessarily entail cultural revolution. This theme is best brought out in Utpal's most well-known play Tiner Talwar.

Tiner Talwar was produced for the first time on August 12, 1971 at the Academy of Fine Arts to commemorate one hundred years of Bengali public theatre. It was Utpal Dutt's homage to his theatre ancestors, as well as an attempt to locate the present day Political theatre into national history, within an older tradition of Bengali theatre. He intended this play to be particularly a tribute to the extraordinary talent,

resourcefulness and determination of the 19th century playwright-director and actor Girish Chandra Ghosh. Utpal depicted the marginalized middle class theatre producers of Girish's era as 'revolutionaries' who tried to put theatre at the service of the common people and the politics of Bengal, in spite of the constraints placed on them by the owners of the companies and the repression of the colonial state. In Utpal Dutt's own words :

On the 100th anniversary of Bengali public theatre I bow down to those wonderful people [of theatre] who did not obey the norms of a leprous society and received from it only insult and humiliation - I bow down to those who tore off the masks from the faces of the wealthy even when they existed under the patronage of those collaborators and pimps - I bow down to those who rattled their tin swords in front of the yawning jaws of British brute force and fashioned an image of revolution from the heartache of a conquered people.²⁷

(my translation).

The necessity of creating a politically and socially engaged theatre is introduced in the very first scene of the first act:

Beni : ... so you don't go to plays ?

Sweeper : Why should I ? What's in it for the like of us any way : The Babus (gentlemen) will live it up at the theatres, screw around with women from the market, and use language that we can't understand. (Pours out some more dirt.) Better to watch the dancing girls or Ramlila in our own slum. This peacock Mayur play or whatever that you mentioned - what's that about ?

Beni : Mayurbahan, you see, is the prince of Kashmir. The story ...

Sweeper : Dawn the prince ! Why do you have to do this ? Get all dressed up in your red and blue clothes and tinsels, paint your faces and play at kings and princes? After all this education why must you tie a tin sword around your waist and act childish?

Beni : Tin sword? Childish?

Sweeper: Why can't you dress as you are? Can't you see that there is a lot of dirt on you?²⁸
(my translation).

Acknowledging that there is a lot of dirt of colonial collaboration on the middle class and a gap between their art and the people, Utpal Dutt tried to dramatize this very problem itself in the play. This crucial question is continued in Daraon Pathikbar in asking how to create a people's theatre without entirely discarding what the middle class has created and trained to think of as theatre. In both we find an attempt to solve the problem by producing an example of such a theatre. In Daraon Pâthikbar the problem is not posed in terms of a contrast between bourgeois and non-bourgeois theatre, but rather of co-existence, where we find that the class lines again merge and there is a mutual appreciation between the producers of people's and bourgeois theatre. The progressive intelligentsia, such as Madhushudan, extend a patronage towards popular entertainment, and a street-theatre group, composed of poor and socially outcast actresses and singers, becomes deeply devoted to the theatre of the progressive bourgeoisie. The private living room theatres of the landed gentry are shown as being dismantled by playwrights such as Madhushudan and Dinabandhu Mitra and brought out into the streets, among the poor. But it is in Tiner Talwar where the issues of revolutionary theatre and theatre aesthetics are explored more deeply. It is here that theatre is situated among the marginal/lumpenized middle classes, and becomes commoditized - a creature of financiers. Here the issue is not one of the coexistence of the two modes, the popular and the bourgeois, but the transformation of entertainment of art theatre into a revolutionary people's theatre.

Tiner Talwar is centred on a 19th century theatre company, The Great Bengal Opera. It is a collage of anecdotes about 19th century theatre, including the story of a trade off made by Girish Ghosh between the lead actress Binodini in return for a permanent stage (The Star Theatre). The play involves a transformation on three levels. At the level of the individual a woman picked up from the street becomes an artist in her own right. This is similar to Bernard Shaw's play Pygmalion - in that it is the training of the director-actor Benimadhab (a proxy for Girish Ghosh) which brings about this transformation, which she then claims as her own doing and being. The other is the change of the bourgeois and individualist artist into a politically engaged one. This is achieved when Benimadhab the artist of "pure" theatre and entertainment becomes a political theatre activist at the cause of Swadeshi struggles. Lastly a transformation at the level of art itself, namely that theatre or art changes its reason of existence is used as a tool or weapon for social intervention. The whole theatre group, including the newly created actress herself, changes its view on what theatre is about and for whom.

At the beginning of the play the company is the property of one Birkrishna Daw, who is a broker for an English merchant house and retail trader in scrap iron. Theatre, for him as much a commodity, holds the same value as coal or scrap iron. Theatre's servitude to him or to commerce not only prevents any politicization of theatre itself, but also any attempt at producing intelligent and socially relevant plays. This commercialization ties up theatre both politically and socially because Birkrishna is unwilling to face the anger of the British Raj, by allowing political performances, and to lose the market among hypocritical, canting, puritanical, local high caste hindu ruling classes, by allowing the performance of

social satires. Faced with this opposition of financiers and "spectator-buyers",²⁹ Benimadhab transcends into "high" art. But he can never protect himself or his group from constant poverty, humiliation and social rejection. The "purity" of art becomes a puerile dream in the face of capital. But Benimadhab's final inspiration to political theatre comes from a radical young member of the intelligentsia, a character modelled on Madhushudan. This character actually projects a conflict and a desire of Benimadhab himself.

The dialogue attributed to Priyanath is actually Benimadhab's own and a declaration of war through the medium of theatre :

As long as our country is under the feet of foreigners, no one can have a moment of relief or rest. When blood of peasants is shed in the great streets of Calcutta - it is my own blood that is drained. A revolutionary soldier, murdered in the outskirts of the distant city of Delhi, is actually one of my own ribs crushed in my chest.³⁰

(my translation).

Fighting against the continuance of a disengaged "pure" and "mere" theatre - Benimadhab finally takes the leap in the last act. Throwing away old compromises and fears of loss of patronage and state repression, Benimadhab, in Utpal's words, "jumps into battle with his tin sword - deep into the struggle of the nationalist movement".³¹ It is

a struggle which grows at the end of the battle of Palashi, and which grows through countless armed uprisings of the Indian peasantry whose history is the only real history of India's independence movement.³²

At the final instance Benimadhab's oppressed theatre challenges colonial brute force to a duel, because :

... all the peasants you murdered, all the honour which you robbed from peasant women, the revenge for all of that has gathered here -- in my arm.³³
(my translation).

The tin sword of theatre becomes effective only when empowered by its relationship with popular movement and feeling. It is not difficult to realize that for Utpal this choice that Benimadhab makes should also be that of the present day Bengali intelligentsia. The reviews of the play show that at least a section of his audience understood that.

So much then of the history plays at the level of their stories-plot or content. But the task now is to assess their politics or class character. But it is precisely this political character which can not be understood unless we examine the kind of ideological position that informs Utpal's politics in general. The narrative content and formal meditations through which this politics is actualized as theatre must then be examined in relation to the general political reference points. In order to get to this overall political position of Utpal Dutt's Marxism and communism, and relatedly, his aesthetics. Politics of representation - both at an aesthetic/dramatic level and that at the level of class - must be treated as two sides of the same project.

A discussion of Utpal Dutt's communism can not happen outside of the context of India's communist movement. He himself says so and emphasises his direct commitment : "... I am partisan, not neutral, and I believe in political struggle. The day I cease to participate in political struggle I shall be dead as an artist too",³⁴ and proclaims his partisan relationship to the CPI(M). The sole purpose of his theatre, as he sees it, is to move the Indian communist movement forward.

But this could only be done by initially identifying the needs and weaknesses of the communist movement. This is a difficult task, given the complex determinations of the communist movement in India. The communist movement having originated in a colonial context, with a nationalist movement already in place, its weaknesses and needs were/are in the area of its relationship between nationalism and class politics. The CPI before the split in 1964, and since then both CPI and CPI(M), have sought to introject a class perspective into a bourgeois democratic politics. They have structured themselves between the two strands of parliamentary democracy and the hope of an eventual communist revolution in the future, with the first seen as a stepping stone for the latter. This mixture of liberal tenets and parliamentary democracy and communist revolution is to be found in the Indian left or Marxist movement in general. Like them and his forerunners, the theorists and practitioners of IPTA, Utpal Dutt also tries to negotiate between these two political positions. He also veers between a culturalist, homogeneous, and nationalist reading of the concept of "the people" and that of class. His politics simultaneously works on the possibilities of a broad front of alliance, and an antagonistic class perspective. The concept "the people" and "class" change their content and weight depending on whether they are articulated to a parliamentary united front or a revolutionary politics.

On close scrutiny it becomes apparent that Utpal Dutt's ambition is to create an effective cultural politics by combining nationalism with communism while trying to incorporate within the mixture some features of liberal democracy. Utpal Dutt, is in this a true heir of IPTA. There also we saw the same ambiguous, continuously readjusting relationship between the communist and the nationalist movement and its politically

ambivalent use of the concept "the people" and the frequent supersession or subsumption of class in that concept. Utpal Dutt's political theatre finds most ambitious expression in his historic mythic theatre. This national communist theatre is to provide a corrective to Indian independence, to complete an incomplete revolution. This is similar to the attempts of the communist parties to create a hegemony and to complete, as well as recreate, an Indian national revolution on a socialist model.

Many members and associates of IPTA, such as Utpal Dutt, who left IPTA and went on to do their own political work in the areas of theatre and film, are haunted by this thought of an unfinished revolution in India. Utpal Dutta, Bijan Bhattacharya, Ritwik Ghatak etc., continue to ask how it is that the possibilities of a national liberation movement gave away before a liberal nationalist movement, and delivered a government of the bourgeoisie and the landlord? Their plays, films and critical writings³⁵ address this question and rehearse the era before independence. They particularly question the CPI's relation to the Indian National Congress, and through criticisms which point to the consequences of the Communist Party's surrender to bourgeois hegemony, try to close the gap and further the revolutionary process. The bitter criticism against the revisionism of the CPI that fills the pages of Towards a Revolutionary Theatre are more than sectarian vituperations. What, he asks, is the reason for this failure?

According to Utpal Dutt, this failure/collaborationist attitude of the CPI resulted from its inability to sympathise with and organize the overall anti-colonial and nationalist sentiments of the Indian "people" and its rejection of armed struggle and fetishization of parliamentary democracy. To

this Utpal Dutt adds the so-called ultra-left sectarian line which came down from the CPSU after the 5th Congress and prevented the creation of a national unity. The CPI, having become caught up with either trade unionism or parliamentarism had no project of armed struggle : "Thus grew a gulf between the party of the proletariat and the mainstream of armed struggle in the country".³⁶ According to Utpal, "The people, everywhere, always, worship armed rebels. They do not sing about Gandhi".³⁷

In Towards a Revolutionary Theatre, Utpal Dutt tries to develop a theory of revolutionary politics and theatre along the line of a specifically Indian and armed revolution. This line is one of balancing the relationship between communism and nationalism and the accommodation within a narrative and theatre form. To create a political consciousness by uniting the two and to create a theatre based on that is the hallmark of political and theatrical realism for Utpal.

He feels that the specificity and complexity of the state of class struggle in India is such that a political project in general and political theatre project for India lie in conceiving the agent "the people" as both a class entity and a non-class national cultural entity. A correct national liberation movement, according to Utpal Dutt, would also have to combine both - simulating a general national cultural movement as well as a class movement. For him a correct party politics and political theatre could only be fashioned along Stalin's prescription for nationalist politics and a revolutionary national culture -- that it should be national in form and socialist in content. This sentence in fact functions as a motto of his theatre, and it is in

Stalin's essay "Marxism and the National Question" that we find the conceptual basis for his epic historical theatre and his guiding principle for constructing a communist movement in India.

More directly influential than Lenin's writings and debates in the Comintern on the same issue, Stalin's position in this document allows us an insight into the formative moment of the communist cultural as well as organizational stance. We can see how from IPTA to now political theatre of Bengal contends with the same issues in almost the same way. We can also see how the aesthetics and politics of representation of communism, from the CPSU (including Lukacs's theories) to Utpal Dutt's theatre, are deeply rooted in the definition of a nation and the political strategies and goals outlined in this text.

We should begin with Stalin's definition of a nation:

A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make up manifested in a common culture.³⁸ (my italics.)

We can see that while conceptualizing a nation Stalin's stress is on the elements of commonality, rather than that of division. A nation is seen to be homogeneous, built on the ground of "a common culture". It is not seen as a conflicted political entity -- riven with class struggle for example -- but rather as a "stable community" which has been "historically constituted" through a shared "culture". So while history and culture are important aspects of a nationalist politics, class is not even mentioned. The bases of nationalist politics are cultural rather than economic, and not connected to class exploitation,

repression and discontentment. Nationalities or nations as such are discontented when cultural self-determination becomes impossible, "... because it [the nation] does not enjoy liberty of conscience (religious liberty) ...", for instance.³⁹ Politics of nationalism is then a politics that strictly busies itself with rights to self-determination on these "superstructural" grounds.

But in a non-democratic and colonial/imperialist context such "regional autonomy", or "equal rights of nations" is impossible. In this situation the structural question of class - of politics based on local and foreign capital - becomes paramount and has to be waged before this historical cultural community of a nation can find its own free and equal expression. So what is possible for the minorities or nationalities in the context of a socialist republic such as the USSR is not possible in a colonized India. In such a situation the cultural, historical commonality of a nation, which exists independently from class politics, becomes the agenda for the local aspiring classes which fight foreign occupation and capital. If the bourgeois/landlord classes -- i.e., the ruling classes - are in ascendancy in national politics, they articulate the nationalist (i.e. cultural) issues to their cause. Demands for a political and cultural autonomy becomes a way to strengthen a bourgeois-landlord hegemony. Class struggle of the proletariat and the peasantry are subsumed within bourgeois nationalism. As Stalin puts it :

The bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation, repressed on every hand, is naturally stirred into movement. It appeals to its "native folk" and begins to shout about the "fatherland", claiming that its own cause is the cause of the nation as a whole. It recruits itself and army from among its "countrymen" in the interest of ... the "fatherland". Nor do the "folk"

always remain unresponsive to its appeals; they rally around its banner: the repression from above affects them to and provokes their discontent.⁴⁰

And also:

The strength of the national movement is determined by the degree to which the larger strata of the nation, the proletariat and the peasantry, participate in it.⁴¹

Stalin also outlines the conditions under which bourgeois hegemony develops :

... under the conditions of rising capitalism there is a struggle of the bourgeois classes among themselves. Sometimes the bourgeoisie succeeded in drawing the proletariat into the national movement, and then the national struggle externally assumes a "nation-wide" character. But this is so externally. In its essence it is always a bourgeois struggle, one that is to the advantage and profit mainly of the bourgeoisie.⁴²

Stalin's statements regarding the situation when other class struggles are hijacked by the bourgeoisie for their own class power actually speaks to the state of affairs in India. In fact Utpal Dutt, and other PWAA and IPTA activists during and after the Indian independence, saw a similar process in action as the Indian National Congress rose to power. They also saw the communist movement failing itself and the people of India. They could agree with Stalin's view that depending on "the degree of development of class-antagonism, on the class consciousness and degree of organization of the proletariat [i.e. their Party]" it "rallies to the banner of bourgeois nationalism" or does not.⁴³ They saw the bourgeois take-over being facilitated by "diversions" created by the political persecutions carried on by the English rulers, because the attention "of a large strata" was drawn away from "social

questions", to the ones "common" to the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Then arose nations such as "harmony of interests" across classes, "glossing over the class interest of the proletariat", resulting into "intellectual enslavement of workers".⁴⁴

But whereas Stalin's essay gave an idea as to how nationalist movements should have a class thrust in colonial situations, it kept national/cultural issues intrinsically and theoretically separated from, though added to, class issues. Nor did it spell out the particulars of creating a movement in colonized countries which would have a mass and a class character simultaneously. In fact the detailed analysis that he does offer is in the context of the USSR, where the socially and economically contradictory character of nationalism is actually sought to be diffused by separating out class questions from what he calls "national"/cultural ones. Commonality is the element that is stressed as a feature of national groups, and the analysis always veers towards a cultural rather than a structural questions, thereby creating two related but separate spheres. Nor does Stalin offer an insight into the question of how to create a "proletarian" struggle when the industrial working class is very small and the peasantry predominates. In this use too, the category "the people" (a key word in nationalist movements), continuously slips from a class connotation, which divides the national terrain, into one of cultural, linguistic, religious, creative-cultural commonness and unites by over-riding or subsuming many of the class elements.

A communist programme that unites these two aspects of national and class politics is to be found in the CPI(M)'s programme of People's Democratic Revolution (PDR), which finally rests upon the proletariat (in the shape of the Party) the task

of completing the project of the bourgeois revolution and enlightenment, and sees the projects of class and nation as compatible. Utpal Dutt fully subscribes to the PDR. It is the key to his epic aesthetics. For this reason he has been accused of political opportunism.⁴⁵ But if we look at the thrust of Utpal's work from its very first stage, we can see the coincidence between its early thrust and the eventual conjoining of liberal democracy with class struggle, which is the CPI(M) project. The Peoples Democratic Revolution, as he understands it, clarifies for him as a cultural producer the task of a theatre activist in the present political situation. We should attend to two statements in which he accurately presents the basic politico-cultural projects of the PDR :

... but I doubt if revolutionary practices of the theatre have worked out what this Peoples Democratic Revolution implies in terms of the battle for people's minds. I doubt if many of us have realized that this means that many of the slogans in such a revolution will be inherited from the great bourgeois-democratic revolutions of Europe, but since the semi-colonial bourgeoisie is incapable of raising them, the proletariat must take up the task and with the help of other revolutionary class, fulfill the democratization of the country. And since the proletariat must exercise hegemony in this revolution, it is no longer a bourgeois democratic revolution, which is part of the world-socialist revolution. But its content will be democratic and therefore related to, for example, the thoughts of the Great French Revolution of 1789.⁴⁶

Where a people's democratic revolution will differ from the ideas of Diderot and Rousseau will precisely be where the revolutionary bourgeois thinkers halted in confusion, where they became scared by their own honest findings, and instead of pursuing their own logic, sought to find compromise, within the framework of bourgeois society. The proletarian democratic revolution is aimed at finally smashing that framework, and therefore will not halt, but pass onto the next stage, a socialist revolution.⁴⁷

We should carefully attend to the statement that the content of Indian communist revolution "will be inherited from the great bourgeois revolution", realize the "ideas of Diderot and Rousseau" and be "related to the Great French Revolution of 1789". However, it will be the task of "the proletariat" to "fulfill the democratization of the country", though of course "with the help of other revolutionary classes". And in the next stage - after ushering in an era of enlightenment and establishing a parliamentary democratic framework - the proletariat "will not halt, but pass onto the next stage, a socialist revolution". PDR is meant as the culmination of the incomplete revolution - the genuine independence that by-passed India. This position can be directly related to a sentence from Stalin, which featured on the walls of Calcutta during the Stalin Centenary year : "The banner of bourgeois democracy lies in the dust today, the proletariat must pick it up and carry it forward". Under this banner proletarian and bourgeois theatre can surely coexist side by side, as can socialism and class harmony.

We should note how the PDR and a Stalinist or Second Internationalist politics allows for the possibility of retainment of bourgeois culture as well as an equation between national culture and bourgeois culture. This is the result of both considering the bourgeoisie, and in particular European bourgeoisie, as a revolutionary class, and culture in a non-mediatory relationship with class. These views allow Utpal Dutt to hold an admiration for two strident extremes of theatre/literature and even find a reconciling principle among them. He can admire and emulate high bourgeois culture and speak of class struggle, or use agit-prop forms, all at once. He assumes that the bourgeois literature of one era can be the

legacy of, serviceable to, the proletariat of the next. These positions are overtly demonstrated, in plays such as Daraon Pathikbar, where these antagonistic classes can come to an easy, spontaneous collaboration with each other, in which "the people" find a natural leader (not just an ally), for instance in Madhushudan or Vidyasagar, in the bourgeoisie, who leads them on to a national struggle - in this instance a cultural struggle against colonialism. The use of the two categories, "the people" and class, in this play shows clearly the problems involved in synthesizing a dual politics - where relations between class and culture, revolution and bourgeois democracy remain unsettled but constant. Again in Tiner Talwar we find a similar reworking of the concepts of the people and revolution. Whereas in most of his other plays the spectrum includes workers and peasants, here with the exception of the first five minutes of the play, where a sweeper is instructed to us, "the people" are the theatre people of the 19th century stage. This re-definition of "the people" and the politics of cultural nationalism speaks more of a cultural revolution under the leadership of the petty bourgeois intelligentsia than an armed class struggle. If it results in an armed struggle at all, it is more likely to be annexed to a bourgeois national venture than one of class struggle and the victory of the proletariat.

Part II : Utpal Dutt -- an assessment

Political subjects in themselves do not make political theatre ... you can have a play dealing with racism, or sexism, or fascism, and if the subject is dealt with in, let's say, an Ibsen-like way, then the audience is left with nothing to do in working on the problem; you might just as well read about the subject in a newspaper. That is not political theatre.

Edward Bond, Interview in Plays and Players.

A bourgeois theatre and a revolutionary project can well go together, if culture can be abstracted from class. The coherence between a Stalinist political project which separates class from culture and a bourgeois nationalist theatre aesthetic will become evident as we discuss the epic historic theatre of Utpal Dutt, with its core of mythic realism. This aesthetic project can be directly traced to the socialist epic-mythic project developed by Maxim Gorky in the Stalinist era. We should take note of Gorky's statement at the very beginning of our discussion ?

Any myth is a piece of imagining. Imagining means abstracting the fundamental idea underlying the sum of a given reality, and embodying it in an image; that gives us realism. But if the meaning of what has been abstracted from reality is amplified through the addition of the desired and the possible - if we supplement it through the logic of hypothesis - all this rounding off the image -- then we have the kind of romanticism which underlies the myth, and is most beneficial in its promoting a revolutionary attitude toward reality, an attitude that in practice refashions the world.¹

The inspiration for Utpal Dutt's serious political theatre lies in the Stalinist politics discussed in the previous part and statements such as these. In fact he is a self-confessed Stalinist. He wrote two plays in homage to Stalin, Louha Manab (The Man of Iron) and Stalin 1934. And also in Stanislavsky Theke Brecht, for example, he discusses the Stalinist base of his own epic philosophy :

In the question of form there is nothing that is the greatest or the ultimate. Formula is the death of drama. Moreover according to Stalin the form always has to be national, the content socialist. Every nation (jati) has created its favourite forms for many centuries. It will want to see its revolutionary theatre in those very forms. Perhaps the revolutionary message will reach the Japanese the quickest if put through Kabuki, to the people of Bengal in Jatra, and in South India through dance, in Maharashtra in Tamasha, in Uttar Pradesh in Nautanki, in Gujarat through Bhawai. The main issue is the revolutionary content. The form is dependent on a country and time, content is eternal.² (my translation).

We can see from the above quotation how Utpal assumes, as did Stalin and others, a commonality of culture at the level of the nation (jati) - both in ideas and forms of art, as well as in the separation between form and content. In their view national culture is assumed to be homogeneous, and can override divisions such as that of class and manifest in a body of unified, shared images, forms and ideas. To create a theatre that can thus capture the so-called spirit of a nation and an age through its form, and direct it towards the content of a communist revolution, is the historical mission, of Utpal Dutt's political theatre.

In order to create such a theatre which projects a commonality and builds a national culture, and fuses or overrides the divisions of a class society and yet accommodate class

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Edward Bond, Interview in Plays and Players.

A bourgeois theatre and a revolutionary project can well go together, if culture can be abstracted from class. The coherence between a Stalinist political project which separates class from culture and a bourgeois nationalist theatre aesthetic will become evident as we discuss the epic historic theatre of Utpal Dutt, with its core of mythic realism. This aesthetic project can be directly traced to the socialist epic-mythic project developed by Maxim Gorky in the Stalinist era. We should take note of Gorky's statement at the very beginning of our discussion ?

Any myth is a piece of imagining. Imagining means abstracting the fundamental idea underlying the sum of a given reality, and embodying it in an image; that gives us realism. But if the meaning of what has been abstracted from reality is amplified through the addition of the desired and the possible - if we supplement it through the logic of hypothesis - all this rounding off the image -- then we have the kind of romanticism which underlies the myth, and is most beneficial in its promoting a revolutionary attitude toward reality, an attitude that in practice refashions the world.¹

The inspiration for Utpal Dutt's serious political theatre lies in the Stalinist politics discussed in the previous Part and statements such as these. In fact he is a self-confessed Stalinist. He wrote two plays in homage to Stalin, Louha Manab (The Man of Iron) and Stalin 1934. And also in Stanislavsky Theke Brecht, for example, he discusses the Stalinist base of his own epic philosophy :

In the question of form there is nothin that is the greatest or the ultimate. Formula is the death of drama. Moreover according to Stalin the form always has to be national, the content socialist. Every nation (jati) has created its favourite forms for many centuries. It will want to see its revolutionary theatre in those very forms. Perhaps the revolutionary message will reach the Japanese the quickest if put through Kabuki, to the people of Bengal in Jatra, and in South India through dance, in Maharashtra in Tamasha, in Uttar Pradesh in Nautanki, in Gujarat through Bhawai. The main issue is the revolutionary content. The form is dependent on a country and time, content is eternal.² (my translation).

We can see from the above quotation how Utpal assumes, as did Stalin and others, a commonality of culture at the level of the nation (jati) - both in ideas and forms of art, as well as in the separation between form and content. In their view national culture is assumed to be homogeneous, and can override divisions such as that of class and manifest in a body of unified, shared images, forms and ideas. To create a theatre that can thus capture the so-called spirit of a nation and an age through its form, and direct it towards the content of a communist revolution, is the historical mission, of Utpal Dutt's political theatre.

In order to create such a theatre which projects a commonality and builds a national culture, and fuses or overrides the divisions of a class society and yet accommodate class

struggle, Utpal Dutt resorts to the notion of epic. Its end is to produce both national and proletarian myths to further a communist revolution. As we have seen in the previous section, it consists of mythicization and apotheosis, i.e., the fixation and enlargement, of particular historical individuals and events in history. In order to put together such a governing aesthetic and a representational apparatus Utpal Dutt draws upon various and disparate indigenous and foreign sources. His sources range from Indian epics to bourgeois Bengali and European literature and mythopoeic attempts by nationalist and revolutionary writers, especially from Germany and the USSR. Though following Brecht and Piscator, and probably in order to give it a socialist context and legitimacy, he also called it "epic theatre", but Utpal's epic theatre is not the epic theatre of either of these dramatists. His epic theatre typically suits his own, a combination of an Indian and a Soviet style, politics.

In order to get to the heart of Utpal Dutt's politics, and since the concept of epic theatre has become identified with the theatre of Brecht, it is important to differentiate his theatre project from Brecht's. We will begin with Utpal's own discussion on Brecht's epic theatre. It is far more revealing of his own epic aesthetic and practice than that of Brecht. Here is his version of Brecht's intentions for constructing the epic form.

After much thinking Brecht came to this conclusion, that showing too many emotions all together creates too much complication in the play. It creates confusion in an ordinary audience in understanding the theory of revolution. On the other hand as a Marxist, as a dialectician, it was impossible for him to think of man as purely white or black. His epic convention was a discovery to create a solution to this problem or we might say that it was a

re-discovery. As he took from the ancient epics an analytical and distancing perspective, he also supplied the answer to the question of 'how shall I show man?', from that very ancient epic. Shakespeare's characters become increasingly more complex from scene to scene, but that never happens in the ancient epics. Arjun or Karna are never mentally agitated, they are great and tranquil as stone sculptures. In each can to they show different emotions. Arjun is sometimes a lover, sometimes a great warrior, and sometimes averse to war ... This does not wait for so called logic. An epic, because it distances itself, is not locked within an everyday life. As we don't need a worldly logic for legends, so for epics. Brecht has re-established this form in the light of modern science, and conferred on to theatre the greatness of legends and the nobility of the epic. Courage is sometimes a mother, sometimes a cunning trader, sometimes a satirist of the feudal war monger, sometimes bewildered and stupid ... All these, all together, slowly create the whole human being. Courage in the audience's imagination. 3

Dutt's version of Brecht is actually a mirror of his own work. Brecht himself was not interested in a display of emotions -- neither in "too many all at once" nor sequentially -- nor in creating characters with depth -- "the whole human being" -- and certainly not in "greatness" and "nobility". In fact if we return to the chapter on realism we will immediately see that Brecht's interest in the epic form had nothing to do with its content of stories of heroic deeds of heroic men and their battles or historic, imperial mission. Unlike Utpal, he did not believe that they form the content of the cultural unconscious of Europe or that there was such a homogeneous cultural unconscious. Brecht used the epic form for the exact opposite reason of Dutt, namely, to create distance and alienation -- as a narrative form with which the European audiences of his time had very little connection. It was a major device for the 'alienation-effect'. This alienation effect gave the

distance required by the audience and author alike for a critical and a "logical" representation of contemporary reality. So it was the form -- the non-linear, but not illogical, narrative structure -- and not the content that interested Brecht in epics. He saw the epic structure as choppy, with self-contained episodes, each with its own life and logic. Through the use of this device he sought to destroy what might be called a singular focus or a perspective view on reality in theatre. Decentred in this way, the pieces of episodes, possible actions and options, could only form a whole dramatic structure as a set of social and critical relations with each other. The text was held together by these relations, and not through an internal, cause and effect sequence of events or emotional connections, or through any primary episode governing the others. His interest was in actively critical and mediatory relations between the parts, as well as between the play and the audience. Meaning was gained from referring the episodes and their relations within the play to a social reality and a social analysis that lie outside the text. The socialist/communist politics of a play such as Mother Courage and her Children or Galileo for example, cannot be found in its story or dialogue -- in any of the characters, events, or decisions -- but rather in a series of provocative textual disjunctions and in the audience-text conjunction, which prompts one to think exactly the very opposite of what is going on on the stage. The need for breaking the old Aristotelian unities of time, space and action, in short a political and formal opposition to hundreds of years of theatre of property and the bourgeoisie, made Brecht gravitate towards the epic form.

Utpal Dutt on the other hand does not want to operate within the Brechtian tradition of alienation and criticality. He has only a limited formal interest in epics, and makes no use of their discursive episodic structure, which Brecht used in order to insert political comments and social analysis. Utpal's comments on Brecht's particular use of epics offer us a point of entry for discussing his own :

The amazing thing is that Brecht held up to us arrogantly the reverse of what people always understood the epic-hero to be. Brecht is suspicious of an earth shaking under heroic trade. Only unfortunate countries need heroes. Courage and Galileo both say this. Brecht's heroes are dwarfs in social life. Brecht has created the fantasy world of epic and unleashed in it a bunch of kicked around, selfish little creatures, who think it's heroic to cheat others and survive. Brecht's epic is also a cruel satire of the ancient epics. His plays are not epics - but at once the re-establishment and destruction of it.⁴

Utpal's interest in epics is in their content, in the masculine and the heroic, and in terms of exaggerated emotions, large scale characterization and scope of action. Unlike Brecht, with his interest in distancing and alienation, Utpal's intention is to create a theatre of absorption through what he considers to be a common national heritage. According to Dutt the ancient epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, are a part of "our national psyche". Trapped in this notion of a common heritage, he sees no distinction between how they are understood or used by the different classes, or in the cities and the countryside of India or Bengal. In fact, it is the perception and use of the Indian epics by his 19th century middle class ancestors that provides him with the basis and

the perspective for the project of a national, cultural united front for politics. Heroism of both action and character, multiple incidents, and great battles are what he selects out of the epic's content. This use of epics is a characteristic of 19th and 20th century history plays and unbanned commercial jatra. These features are also coherent with Utpal's own interest in Shakespeare and Elizabethan plays. Furthermore, unlike for Brecht, emotional absorption and excitement rather than criticality is the heart of Utpal's epic-mythic project. The epic, for him, is a matter of grand passion.

Utpal Dutt re-works the epic form and scope into a bourgeois play, with plots and sub-plots, many scenes, heroic characters and incidents. He changes its episodic structure into a linear dramatic pattern by introducing a single overriding action and focus, mounting emotionality and an internal sequence of regulating causality in a manner resembling fate. The Aristotelian unities reappear in either a modified or a direct way, and contribute to the tale and the fate of one hero. Unlike Brecht's Utpal's epic hero is constructed without irony, and the play revolves on his "action" - i.e., on his success or failure as the plot centres on some world-shattering event, rather than on the trivia of capitalism that occupies Brecht. It is his own theatre that we get an insight into when he discovers a "hero" (or anti-hero), "characters" in the sense of the word the individual and "a quest for a whole man" in either the epics or Brecht's plays, and moreover finds them compatible with Shakespearean inner-conflicts. This is why he can erroneously deduce that Brecht used the epics in a sequence of actions and emotions to create a "rounded character" as A.C. Bradley said of Shakespeare or that he sought "to create a whole man" out of

fragmentary experiences.⁵ His own plays are created on a totalist view of reality, as for instance prescribed by Lukacs, with an intact and sequentially organized surface, rather than as a set of intersecting social relations.

We must remind ourselves at this point that the politics of Brecht's theatre and Utpal Dutt's differ substantially. Utpal Dutt's epic theatre, unlike Brecht's epic theatre for class struggle, is first and foremost a nationalist theatre with an added on rather than an intrinsic socialist agenda. Its purpose, as he himself points out, is not mainly to teach a critical class perspective, but rather to incite the audience to class hatred and armed political action with an assumption that the audience knows all it needs to know about class and the appropriate emotions pertaining to "class characters". Though Bharucha sees the box-office as the sole motive behind the emotionalism of his plays, there is actually a political reason which is far more relevant :

It is a proven-fact that if we want to explain the rules of social change Brecht's technique is the best. But for a Marxist, to explain is not the only task, but also to incite, to promote class-hatred, to 'instill in the audience's subconscious a lack of faith in the bourgeois social organisation'.⁶ (Lenin, What is to be done?).

For Utpal Dutt a revolutionary theatre can only be created through introducing great feelings, which inspire the audience to look beyond its petty lives into heroic exploits and sentiments, which in turn move it beyond "the so-called logic of our daily world and "refashion", as Gorky said, "our attitude to reality".⁷ The path of this popular revolutionary

theatre for Utpal lies through the land of history, legends and the heroic :

... the petty-bourgeois writers and directors will never find content in the cul-de-sac of their own class. If they wish to survive as artists, they must listen to the screams, howls and songs issuing from the new Elsinore, watch new Hamlets and Lohengrins set out on a mission of setting right a world out of joint, confront new tragedies, taking massive shape just outside the petty bourgeois hovels.

To create new tragedies, new heroes and their violence against new villains, the artist must acquire by choice the standpoint of the class that is making new history - namely the proletariat.⁸

It is melodrama with its steep ups and downs of passion rather than epic that serves his theatre in its revelation of what he calls the "mythic" or essential reality. He reads just such a melodrama into Goethe's Faust (Part I), and in his reading he finds a suitable form and vision. According to Dutt, while the inside of Faust (encases the Zeitgeist of a capitalist Germany, its significance becomes universal for all of capitalism by the use of the form of melodrama which surpasses the "realistic" level, with ghosts, witches, and black magic ... including ... horror.⁹

The ultimate purpose of Utpal's epic theatre is to create "myths", rather than question or work with the ones which already exist. Myths for him are characterized and fictionalized "essences" or "truths" - they are the product of the highest kind of realism. The literary method of this mythic realism is obviously not naturalism, but even its

epistemology is not concerned with the actually existing everyday life. It is through a transcendence of the particular, of daily life, and historical and social time and space that his epic-mythic theatre is sought to be created. His epic-mythic ideals are worth re-counting in this context. In his essay on "Form of Theatre" in TARI he makes the following statements :

A myth is a poetic summary of a people's collective experiences. It is the signature of a whole historical epoch ...

A myth transcends time because it has nothing to do with "realism" in the vulgar sense.

It aims at the supre-real and therefore remains true in different contexts, in different versions.¹⁰

The mythic therefore has to be not only artistic and artificial but also idealist in its conception of a temporality. Neither the "essential" truth about reality nor the creation of true art is possible for him by staying close to what he calls "life". It comes out most clearly in Stanislavskir Path when, assessing his favourite actor and director, he states both his and Stanislavsky's theatre ideal :

Art is not created through an imitation of life. Acting is not a parody of a man seen on the street. Acting is life-transcending, a harmonious expression that rises above life.¹¹

In this kind of statement we see the coming together of a purely idealist version of truth and art with a political aim that purports to be communist/socialist and effect historical social changes within a distinctly temporal dimension.

The mythic-epic attempt is meant to capture a whole people's collective experiences (it is the national ideal again) as though such an experience were possible in actuality, rather than those of certain classes, and thus both appeals to and creates a commonality. It is interesting that along with this a temporal, essentialist project Utpal Dutt can talk at once about the importance of history. He speaks of "transcending time", of art being "supre-real" and "true in different contexts" as well as "socialist/communist revolution in the same breath. In order to establish a base-line that holds for all, Utpal Dutt ends up by eradicating the very contemporaneity and specificity which he holds characteristic of a non-abstract, "non-quixotic" political theatre.

These totalist epic ventures lack as yet, for Utpal, a fully accomplished form or a model. In TARI he tells us that he has to break a new path :

The proletarian myths have not been created. The proletarian revolution has not produced its Goethe and Schiller yet. There are historical reasons for it ... the proletariat, / however / under the bourgeois, is reduced to the level of a cretin, except for a handful of labour aristocrats, who, being puppets to be used against the proletariat, no longer remain proletarian.¹²

He turns for hints and models to the established European bourgeois or Bengali nationalist (also bourgeois) theatre. He finds in Shakespeare the most relevant structure of characterization for the mythic-epic. In Shakespeare's Samaj Chetana (Shakespeare's Social Consciousness), he speaks of Shakespeare's dramatic structures and characters - heroes

and villains - that can embody "the spirit of the age" in "mythic" figures such as that of Hamlet. In Hamlet and King Lear, for example, he finds a total embodiment, a complete man, not to be found anywhere else except in the epics.¹³

But Utpal reserves his greatest praise for Richard Wagner for creating "a new myth, a revolutionary Holy Grail, a poetic reinterpretation of the oldest ballads in North European memory".¹⁴ After discussing the operas he says that Wagner's great achievement was, "to marshal the knight, armour and all, to the service of revolutionary bourgeois ideology".¹⁵

Among the Bengali theatre producers and playwrights he credits Girish Ghosh for having tried a mythopoetic theatre. But compared to Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller and Wagner, he feels Girish's work is a failure - "his outlook was probably vitiated by an unwarranted veneration for his heroes".¹⁶ Utpal blames a historical determination for this failure since colonialism prevented India from producing either a bourgeois or a proletarian revolution : "Naturally no myth, proletarian and bourgeois, has been created in India in the field of art and literature".¹⁷ He also relies on the dramatized versions of epical stories in jatra and the historical and mythological plays. These modified examples of early or precapitalist theatre are considered by him as India's only valid and substantive sources of heroism and grand visions necessary for constructing myths. They are the Indian counterparts of the bourgeois heroic myths of Europe, and reconcilable within the same text.

It is interesting that whereas Utpal Dutt spends such time discussing bourgeois playwrights and directors, such

as Wagner, who had a mythic project without an interest in socialism and a "folkism" without any class content, he spends less time on a socialist playwright who also wanted to create proletarian myths. Though he alludes to Maxim Gorky periodically, produced The Lower Depths and used Gorky's advocacy of imagination as the way to truth to legitimize his own mythic project, he discusses him only cursorily, and finally even negatively. After many pages on the successes of Richard Wagner as a creator of a genuine popular revolutionary myth in the legends of Siegfried, Lohengrin, Parsifal etc. later providing the mythology of German National Socialist Party he mentions Gorky only to inform us that he had failed in his mythic project due to his "revolutionary romanticism". Gorky was, in contrast to Wagner, for example, "too involved in his hero's fate, too sympathetic to the hero's goal".¹⁸

This assessment of Gorky is very intriguing. The fact is that Utpal's own project to create a national and revolutionary theatre, at the service of contemporary communist politics in a classically romantic mode, was most clearly formulated by Maxim Gorky in an effort of socialist construction in the USSR. This becomes evident from the 1934 Writers Congress held in the USSR. And furthermore a similar directive presence of particularly Lenin's, and Stalin's thought also shapes the course of Gorky's literary philosophy and forms of production. Gorky was well known in India and there were many translations of his novels, plays and stories. His literary theories were also well known and much debated.¹⁹

In TARI it is actually in the few allusions to Gorky that we find the parallel of another literature and theatre

that is both socialist and romantic. Put in another way, it is in the project of socialist realism, with its core of revolutionary romanticism, that we find a European version of the aesthetic of the mythic-epic theatre of Utpal Dutt. Socialist realism of this type allows a blend of revolutionary nationalism theatre of urban Bengal (from Girish Ghosh to Sachin Sengupta), urbanized jatra and the progressive bourgeois literature/theatre of the west. It is in Gorky that Utpal Dutt gets his theory of myth, of a romantic political theatre which captures truth through imagination and exaggeration, rather than in the critical realism of the older socialist project. Feelings and national cultural myth and symbols become the staple of this art. As he calls his theatre "epic" to situate it in a genealogy of political theatre, so too he used Gorky's definition of myth to legitimize his own practice:

As Maxim Gorky explained Myth, it is not idle imagination or pure fabrication but a glorified, exaggerated statement of a very real problem of the ancient world.²⁰

Gorky's mythic project was simple and grand. He talked of a mythic work as being "a piece of imagining", "abstracting the fundamental idea", and "embodying it in an image". Contrary to what had been so far claimed as realism, this active exercise of imagination, he claims "gives us realism". But it is not the realism of daily life that surrounds us, rather "reality is amplified", "supplemented" by "the logic of hypothesis".²¹ This excursion into what does not yet exist, hitherto negatively branded as "escapist", fantastic and romantic by both positivist and critical communism, had now become important for the work of revolutionary construction of the USSR. Stalin himself had endorsed romanticism as

did cultural theorists such as Zhdanov, Radek and Bukharin as indicated by the 1934 Congress. But, as pointed out by Gorky in his essay "Advice to Young Writers", this romanticism was not considered "bourgeois" - consisting of decadence, despair and degeneracy - but rather "revolutionary".²² "The kind of romanticism which underlies the myth" is aimed towards "promoting a revolutionary attitude towards reality" ... "in practice" it "refashions the world". "Romanticism" for Gorky "is an active attitude towards life".²³

We have discussed so far how at the level of content and construction of his plays and theatre philosophy Utpal Dutt tries to create a "popular" and "revolutionary" theatre in accordance with a Stalinist political programme of a People's Democratic Revolution. In this section we will examine his use of various theatre styles and forms in order to find a language for the full range of his political theatre. We must remember that he has to produce theatre for an immediate pragmatic and daily business of the Communist Party, trade-unions and provincial politics - as much as for his epic-mythic history project. As the purpose and the content varies, so must the form. Since from our standpoint politics and theatre are irreducible meditating components of each other, we must explore the form-content relationship in his work. Though Utpal himself, in the following quotation for example, separates out "the message" or "the content" from the form, and feels that the content remains uncompromised in its dress of whatever form "pleases" the audience, we ourselves can not adopt this attitude :

The director belched : "No Sir, why? Why should I put cheap and reactionary material

on my stage? Whoever told you that whatever is stateable and popular is cheap and vulgar?

The playwright was pacing in intolerable rage.

Continuing his pacing he asked : "So what does popular or stateable really mean?"

The director picked his teeth with a match stick and said : "I don't know about other theatres; may be there they do use the audience as an excuse for showing cheap things, like the Bombay movie directors do. But I have faith in myself. It's impossible to bring any reactionary material in my theatre while trying to make it stateable. And yet, the play must have such tension, such speed, such surprise that the audience must have such tension, such speed, such surprises that the audience must get real pleasure from it, so that they won't boycott my theatre. I don't compromise at all on the count of content. I maintain the playwright's progressive message absolutely intact, because I am also a progressive man. But that message, that content must appear in front of the audience, set up on the stage with such styles and techniques, that the audience can understand, appreciate, be pleased with it. Otherwise what will happen - just this, that even a strong message will appear in a non-understandable form, and no one will get it. The message is then completely lost. Formal experiments can never discount the question of the audience.²⁴

Whether Utpal Dutt's theatre politics furthers a revolutionary goal or not must therefore be answered in the context of a taken-for-granted set of theatre mediations, which constitute a part of the common sense of the theatre going and producing Bengali middle-class. This element of class subjectivity, expressed through the form, is a vital one in any study of politics of art.

We already know that an interest in both a national-cultural and class politics governs Dutt's theatrical choice and experiments. He is simultaneously theatrically pragmatic and ideologically dogmatic. What his audience is familiar with - the national tradition of bourgeois theatre - becomes the vehicle of his politics. After all, as Utpal says, even "a terribly strong message" could also be "lost" if the audience could not read it in the theatre's text nor relate it to any of their previous theatre experiences. It is for this reason, not simply out of a commercial interest, that he says "Formal experiments can never discount the question of the audience". As this politics tries to combine divergent ideological strands into one, so it does with divergent theatre traditions. Hence his search through both national and international repertoire. His theatrical eclecticism is a practical dimension of his political necessity. His search for form, and his formal combinations, are devices for presenting his politics effectively. What he sees as the ideal Marxist/communist stand in the matter of formal experimentation, we find in the following remark on Brecht :

There should be no obligation to obey any convention because it is established, nor should there be a reluctance to use it because it is an old convention. After all Brecht's theatre is political theatre, its politics must reach the people. This is the only intention of this theatre. Those who sit on judgement on Brecht's theatre using the criteria of aesthetics, are as though judging a 25-inch cannon as a thing of beauty. A political theatre can not be encompassed within an aesthetics any more than armaments can be. Political theatre operates with only one condition - whether the politics is accurately reaching the audience. One must do

whatever is necessary for that. Brechtian techniques - alienation and surprise - are the creation of a political necessity.²⁵

What we want to do then is not to explain away the seemingly antithetical aspects of Utpal's theatre and politics, but put side by side the form and the politics, and we will see, as we did in the previous section, why it is that these old bourgeois playwrights proved to be of such interest and a source of influence for him or why antithetical forms and contents can cohabit without producing a sense of contradiction. We found that the epic-mythic quest is largely suited to a national and bourgeois cultural quest - and not a part and parcel of a proletarian theatre. Instead of positing an unqualified contradiction between the European bourgeois or older nationalist theatre of Bengal and Utpal's own theatre, it would perhaps be more fruitful to ask what they have in common politically, so that his formal affinity and attitude to those theatres may be better understood. And furthermore we should remember that Utpal considers theatre to be an art and the purpose of art as being to produce pleasure consisting of a small core of instruction and a great deal of passion. Unlike Brecht, who also brought pleasure into the theatre, but insisted that it be of learning,²⁶ Dutt does not equate the two. For him the message can come dressed in many forms. He is not particularly concerned about the problems that the message can get into, or be transformed into, as a result of the dresses or the forms. We have to question, then, why or how he can afford to overlook theatrical mediation's ability to mediate the politics of theatre.

Utpal Dutt is not only convinced that theatre is an art, but he is a proponent of an ostentatious, self-conscious

theatre art, of what Grotowski calls a "rich theatre",²⁷ meaning a theatre that uses a proscenium stage and draws upon many other arts, disciplines and technology to enrich itself. Multiple forms and techniques combine to create his language of theatre, the less austere the better. Utpal sees theatre as an art that is synthetic, polymorphic and synaesthetic. Asking the question, "But where are the rules for theatre? Where is its grammar, its lexicon?"²⁸ he proceeds to list the elements of theatre, namely the actor with his dialogue, gestures and movement, and the stage design, light and music. Theatre is "promiscuous", an attempt to unite what we hear and see. "Isn't there such a ground at all where visuals and music, dance and words, without losing their integrity, sit at the same table?"²⁹ With the proper daring, daring to be both artificial and artistic, one could create "a theatre which was the combined creation of many arts, where sound can become colour, and colour sound".³⁰ Needless to say, with such an opulent view of theatre as a "total" art, whose "muse" is "proud, queenly and resplendent" Utpal Dutt is an enthusiast of the proscenium stage.³¹

The theatre taste that derives from the last one hundred years of Bengali urban, professional stage, is the staple of Utpal Dutt's theatre. The world of professional and traditional stage became Utpal's natural habitat and at no point in time could he conceive of politics in any other way except theatrically, but nor did he ever attempt a theatre from which he did not glean a political service of sorts. But Utpal Dutt's standard remained the old proscenium stage, which has become identified with theatre proper. An elevated box stage with curtains, with inner stages, wings, revolving sets, light and amplification, this is the stage of mainstream

theatre in front of which generations of audiences have waited for the thrill of the curtain to rise since the beginning of the national theatre era in Bengal. With some variations in its internal organization, Utpal Dutt has mounted all his full-length plays on this stage and written them with this stage in mind. The stage directions in his printed texts point to stage environment, devices of organizing, varying and speeding up the action, all of which clearly show the centrality of this stage as an organizing principle of dramatic representation. Not only are there frequent changes of scene through the use of curtains, but also the role of light (in spot-lighting acting zones by using certain colours of light and darkening the other areas) is similar, and as well signifies levels of reality within the play.

Utpal Dutt's stage is mainly a direct descendent of 19th century colonial, and by extension, bourgeois commercial European stage. In fact in its fullness of decor, sound and light, and excessiveness of emotions, it has an old fashioned victorian touch to it. It lacks the severity of a modernist or post-modernist stage. It is not the sparse stage of Brecht, nor the denuded stage of the theatre of the absurd. Nor is it the naturalist stage of the drawing room theatre. It is a little too stuffed, too warm, often it conjures up the aura of red velvet stage furniture, gilded mirrors, or epic battle fields - no matter where they are - be they in Vietnam or the plains of Hindustan. It is however productive of illusions which quite openly suggest its own theatricality and separate reality. The use of painted scenes, not just objects and platforms that constitute space-time relations within the play, is still prevalent as are heavy and manifold

props, and certainly used consciously by Utpal Dutt when producing plays on 19th century Bengali theatre and life. This stage, in short, is a highly "theatrical" stage - and is modified to suit different types of his theatre.

Utpal Dutt's contribution to this stage has been to raise its theatricality or artificiality even higher than usual within the IPTA left theatre heritage. It is meant to create an environment for his mythic-epic theatre. The stage for epic theatre, with a high quantity of advanced theatre technology and techniques which elevate it to an "epic" or grand scope level, could not have been possible in the days of Girish Ghosh. The productive forces of their days were far lower, but now it is entirely possible to create a theatre where one not only hears dialogue but sees spectacles and hears music and other sound effects. With Utpal Dutt the element of the spectacular dominates as a part of the epic-mythic expression - though there are also productions where he uses some features of the epic style to be found in Brecht and Piscator.³² In those plays the stage-scope is used to supply information and suggest complexity of action - though the attempt remains mainly that of developing a story linearly.

Along with the influences of theatre proper both from Europe and Bengal, Utpal Dutt uses the indigenous urbanized dramatic tradition of Jatra,³³ as well as forms such as street theatre and agit-prop.³⁴ Utpal Dutt's use of jatra however has not moved him away from the use of the proscenium and its general format. After all, it is not the rural version of jatra with its open platform stage that he draws on. In terms of textual construction perhaps Utpal Dutt has been more

interested in the traditional mythological jatra with its morality plot, great battles, gods and goddesses, kings and queens, than the austere, non-mythological, social jatras of the nationalist Mukunda Das. Utpal Dutt's own jatras are not distinguishable from his historical plays.

Because "epic" theatre has to juggle with such diverse elements, the question of balancing or synthesizing them becomes an important one. The principle of balance or synthesis becomes evident in Utpal's work as a director, even more than as a playwright. The "dramatic action" is not only the story which Utpal re-tells, but a plot, and its staged form, in which the re-presentation takes its complete shape. The directorial work consists of what is called the "composition" of a show - its technique of "mounting". The particulars of the composition come as much from the types of theatre the director prefers as from his politics. In fact the plays are written by many playwrights with the composition in mind. A model for Utpal's theatre is to be found in his version of Kshirod Prasad Vidyavinod's play Alamgir.³⁵ It is here, in a nationalist, big stage production, that we discover the key to Utpal's technique of dramatizing the epic. In his ideal/model of composition of a play the following elements are essential :

- 1) The speed of the action, i.e., the organization of the events should make the audience breathless. There should be parallel actions, which are exciting as well.
- 2) The events should be unusual and surprise the audience continually.

- 3) There should be rapid change of mood as well as events.
- 4) There should be liberal use of humour - to satirize as well as please.
- 5) There should be a "dramatic" development of characters.

Nothing is to dramatic for the purpose of the epic scope :

The expression "over-dramatized" is meaningless. Dramas are meant to be dramatic - pitched at an octave higher than life. Where massive personalities are clashing with each other, empires are rising or falling, how can any incident seem "over-dramatic"?³⁶

How Utpal Dutt himself learnt from his predecessors becomes evident from the organization of the play Tiner Talwar. Here we see that same perfection in split-second timing, rapid rise and fall in moods, flow of action surprise and humour which have been the envy of other directors.

The acting styles of Utpal Dutt's theatre reflect the particular requirements of his theatre. Since in Bengal there are no drama schools that train actors in different styles and traditions, the training of actors happens on the job, as it were, mainly showing what the director wants and is able to train them into- Utpal Dutt's requirement from actors demands a fluency of acting idioms and styles. They range from the heroic of the old historical school, to the simple imitative acting for a representation of everyday reality,

to comic styles. These three styles - natural, heroic-tragic, and comic - have been common in both theatre and films of Bengal. "Character acting", which requires empathy in the actor for his role in producing empathy in the audience is much emphasized. Notions such as alienation effect (A-effect) of Brecht are not of any importance. Only the comic actor, as in the comedy tradition in general, retains a distance, a critical view of his role. For stylistic resources Dutt turns his attention to jatra conventions and styles for his historical plays involving loud, bold projection and non-naturalist acting, as well as the training of Shakespeare acting he received early in life in the school of Kendal and experiences of having attended the performances in England of Lawrence Olivier, Paul Schoffield, etc.

The retention of melodrama based old stage acting in Utpal Dutt's theatre is particularly useful to his epic-mythic mode, where the hero and the villain are established with a great moral clarity. The acting idiom, including the famous laughter of the villain, is used for presenting us with a moral/political schema which is integral to the heroic mode, as for instance are the idioms of light and music. When the hero Shardul Singh appears on the deck of the rebel ship Khyber, singled out by a spotlight, calling out his refusal to surrender, he functions in the signification frame of Kallol in the same way as the communist flag does at the beginning of the play - flying red and resplendent in the bright light of the 'spot'. It is interesting to note that Utpal refers far more frequently and reverentially on Stanislavsky's apolitical theatre and theories in the matter of justifying his acting style, than the political stylistics

of Brecht or Piscator. His actors are required to lose themselves in the part, no matter how heroic, and hold no sense of irony towards them. Not Brecht's *Mother Courage*, but Utpal Dutt's version of Wagnerian heroes, with their nation building, or the feudalized jatra/history play's heroic or villainous type characters, become the actor's source of elulation.

From his own account in *TART* and Stanislavskir Path, Utpal Dutt's actor training programme comes out as highly authoritarian and encourages little or no individual initiative or criticality among members of the group. He justifies this by referring to the acting theories of Stanislavsky, as outlined for instance in the latter's Building a Character.³⁷ In Utpal's hands Stanislavsky's idea of submitting to the "ruling idea" of the text and the role transforms into an absolute submission to the director's dictates.³⁸ Stanislavsky's training of "psycho-technique" for Utpal translates out into an imperative for breaking the actor's ego, and developing an obedience and continuous readiness to submit to the director's needs, rather than the internalization of the part and the personalized projection of it. The mainly liberating aspect of his training programme consists of his demand that his actors become free from religion and politically and historically informed about India, though this is also partially undercut by his attempts to "civilize" the actor by familiarizing him/her with European literature, music, etc. An acquaintance with Mozart and Beethoven, for example, is considered by him to be the hallmark of an actor's necessary personal development.

Utpal Dutt's eclectic theatre project puzzles us at its face value and if we look into his work for what Brecht

of Piscator would have called a proletarian or a full scale anti-imperialist theatre. But as we have found by examining his political intentions and theatre forms, his eclecticism, which is operative both in the area of content and form, politics and art, leads him into contradictory dimensions. We can simultaneously see both a fit and a gap between these elements of his theatre. On the one hand we have a theatre surface, in the action and the message of the text, where the direct and intended politics of class struggle fight with the form of presentation. Where, instead of mediating each other, the content or intention and representation contradict. On the other hand, there is a level which they create by working together. Together they constitute a final political text with a deeper coherence by means of a political and aesthetic symbiosis which reproduces the unclarity of the Stalinist political position itself, with a distinct weight on the bourgeois nationalist component. These different levels of Utpal's theatre have served to confuse critics, who usually argue solely about the surface level of the text.³⁹ The fact that Utpal's contradiction is accounted for by the frame-work of a national bourgeois socialism is thus invisible to them. Though his intention was to complete an unfinished revolution, which of necessity had to have a national dimension vis-a-vis foreign capital and internally one of class, his political and aesthetic framework precipitated him into contradictions and ambiguities. Nationalism and anti-imperialism become confused and bourgeois social relations are simultaneously questioned and affirmed.

Some of the basic reasons for the class and political character of Utpal Dutt's ambitious project of epic-mythic

realism can be summed up in the following points. They follow from the same confusion that IDPA and the communist movement in India as a whole suffers from, namely that of a communism which actively seeks to combine itself with a bourgeois component. From the point of view of constructing a political culture (or theatre) the most explicit factors are that :

- (a) he maintains a separation between class and culture;
- (b) he subscribes to a reflectionist view of culture and ultimately in instrumental relationship between culture and politics, thus also seeing culture in terms of discreet products rather than social processes;
- (c) he equates national theatre and culture primarily with bourgeois or embourgeoisified popular culture and used bourgeois theatre as the vehicle for political theatre;
- (d) he subscribes to a two-stage theory of socialist revolution (which is deeply embedded in India's communist movement from its first phases) in spite of his and the CPI(M)'s profession to the contrary;
- (e) for him, as for the communist movement in general, proletarian leadership means the leadership of the primarily middle class led and organized Communist Party.

For these same reasons that various bourgeois cultural projects are unproblematic for Utpal. He finds acceptable, for example, Wagner's use of the concept of "the folk" without class connotation, as though all of German society was a homogeneous community. From the Bengali tradition, Girish Ghosh's nationalism and Madhushudan's liberal humanism are also attractive for him. He hopes to expand the Framework of the professional stage by injecting into it the category "people". He discovers in nationalist playwrights a revolutionary populism, which he outlines in his extensive book on Girish Ghosh, Girish Manush. In his plays on the progressive intelligentsia of the 19th century, we see that a marginal, radical liberal segment of the middle class, together with their lumpenized peers from the stage, are considered as popular revolutionary forces and classes. Utpal Dutt can reconcile the hindu nationalist politics of Girish Ghosh with the secular liberalism of Madhushudan. Nor does he, in search of a socially binding form, image or myth, ask himself whether or not this harmonious manifestation of the so-called social/cultural unconsciousness depends for its harmony on the imposition on the people of the cultural productions of the ruling and propertied classes. Until one places Utpal's communism in its own tradition of bourgeois enlightenment and liberal progressivism, his astounding concept for both the actual proletariat, and the petty bourgeois, seem puzzling. We unavoidably come to the conclusion that, given the mean and limited horizon of the petty-bourgeoisie, and the "cretinous" state of the proletariat, our political and aesthetic recourse lies solely in the aesthetics of the bourgeoisie.

It is ironic that all the things Utpal Dutt supposedly wants to resist politically, from cultural imperialism to elitism, become the logical features of his own theatre theories and practices as a result of his secure belonging to a colonial middle class and its particular type of socialism. In terms of his embourgeoisified values and tastes we need to only remind ourselves of the continuous praise and normalization of the European bourgeoisie and their art. The praise of Wagner and claims of affinity with him over the work of Brecht for example, infused Utpal Dutt's own work with a deeply imperialist element. This becomes grossly evident as colonial bourgeois snobbery when he outlines his expectations from his actors and his notion of what it means to be a "cultured" person.⁴⁰

In his discussion about the petty bourgeois actor's shortcomings he lists prominently, and on par with their lack of information about Indian politics their lack of knowledge of European literature and culture, their poor English and lack of high Bengali pronunciation. In Daraon Pathikbar there is a real fetishization of Madhushudan's Britishism, his knowledge of European classical and romantic literature and languages with which he outsmarts the Europeans. The avid use of little French phrases, or Latin proverbs, does not do much to convince us of the supposed anti-colonialist politics embodied in the character, nor the frequent laughter raised at incorrect English of the Babus. What is made fun of is not that they need to speak English, but that they do it badly. Madhushudan and his friends however are perfect Black British, and Madhushudan is even more than that in being the first Bengali renaissance man. Madhushudan's

proficiency in European literature and language has a peculiar comprador and bourgeois twist, in the snobbery of display of familiarity with things European which are only names to most lower middle class people. Utpal Dutt's own writing is replete with the same ostentation of erudition - of untranslated quotes or phrases in German and French. These habits are not only redundant, but particularly offensive from somebody whose politics is intended to promote a "national culture" and a socialist revolution. When persuaded thus culture and colonial/imperialist bourgeois culture become synonymous.

Further affirmation of Utpal Dutt's bourgeois affinities lies not only in the song of praise to the Europeans and a handful of Bengali intellectuals, but also in the patronage and condescension that he shows to "the people" when speaking of peasants and other lower classes. He speaks of them as his primitives and natives. In attempting to justify the anti-intellectual, anti-critical and feeling-orientation of his theatre he takes recourse to the excuse that "the people" are passionate and un-critical and thus unable to like critical/intellectual theatre. They embody for Utpal the collective unconscious of society at its most primitive. According to him they can accept violence, insanity and grand, rash actions because unlike the middle class they are still close to their instincts. This action of "the people" as the other of the rational intellectual contains in it a kind of primitivism that with very little effort can become a part of a fascist ideological apparatus. It is in keeping with Utpal's admiration for Wagner and his use of the concept of "the folk" for a purpose that Utpal considers to be revolutionary.

In the perspective of this cultural politics we can see how the conventions of bourgeois theatre, its commonsense practices, both express and mould Utpal's politics. For Utpal to question these representational modes and apparatuses would be tantamount to questioning the validity of theatre itself as an activity. This is the message in his defensive attacks against those who dare to experiment with and question them. This formal conservatism is further facilitated by the fact that Utpal Dutt has an insider's, i.e. a professional's attachment to the bourgeois theatre. This practitioner's knowhow, of being able to produce effects with ready-made devices, is "natural" to with him and he is delighted to increase his theatre repertoire. He advances therefore his theory of epic and total theatre which allows him to mix and maximize all aspects of a high technique, high cost and full theatre. A complete formal arsenal is drawn upon for creating "the world-historical", the intended mythic-epic.

This issue of aesthetic representation is more than a question of exterior mechanism of theatre. Lukacs, in the debate on realism, points out the political stake of forms and styles. When he fights for the "realism" of certain representational methods and conventions, he is arguing for the validity of a version of reality and a politics based on that. The conceptual and formal conventions of any work of art direct us towards particular epistemologies and politics. The politics of Utpal's "mythic realism" can not be understood apart from a fuller discussion of this context.

For Utpal Dutt as for Gorky, myth means a fictional construct based on an imaginative abstraction of the essential reality. Therefore, a myth is not a lie, nor a piece

of fantasy. "Myth" signifies the creation of what is "true" by using the imagination to get at the truth, rather than logical reasoning. It is the total result of the "epic" process, which confers a lasting significance to the imaginative discovery by framing, elevating and enlarging it. The "epic" in this sense is not an oral accretional development through time - as with the ancient Indian epics - but individually and self-consciously produced without the help of an already existing mythic content. Unlike the traditional epics whose ideological and social purpose remains general and unstated, this epic attempt is directed towards a particular and ideologically formulated political agenda. As Utpal states in Towards a Revolutionary Theatre, his mythic project has the ambition of demonstrating in symbolic and fictional form a dialectical and revolutionary view of the world which teaches us the "truth" about reality which must be distinguished from a "fact". Getting at this truth requires getting behind what exists in our everyday life, leaving behind the phenomenal.

If Utpal had stopped at this point he would have been a simple idealist with a matching aesthetic of symbolic realism. But his being a socialist/communist, makes the issue more complicated. Though he avoids what he calls the bourgeois vice of empiricism and advocates the use of intuition, he does not want to be seen as an idealist. He feels that as an objective communist who believes in history that he can not advocate "truth" in any universal sense or accommodate a subjectivist view of class and society. He therefore advances the notion of a universal, yet essential and objective socialist truth as "class truth" which is arrived at by using

intuition and imagination to penetrate into the essential nature of an objective reality which is historical.

Yet, this assurance of objectivity and reference to history, and using the word "class" as an adjective to "truth", does not help Utpal to escape the pitfalls of an objective idealism. It is similar though far less refined to the ideological formulation of Lukacs et al, and appeals to the "laws" of history as objective essences with their internal laws of causality which regulate historical changes. It is still an idealist position, and not the "social-scientific" method of Brecht for example, where the talk of "laws", are discarded in favour of the social relations. Utpal's mythic world view can not accommodate experience, observation, comparison, historicization or criticism. For Brecht class is visible at the surface of daily life in the daily social relations. The abstract dialectical "laws" of history with their economic core do not substitute for the uncountable social interactions between people. In Utpal's case however, "class truth" is discovered by a reverse process, by referring back to the "law" of class-struggle until the proletariat triumphs. Thus class becomes a settled issue, a given. There is a strong imperative in this position not to attend to the existing social relations in the name of essentiality - the mythic or the quintessential. This "law" of class struggle - as an uncluttered ideological category - forms the core of the mythic, and the epic form provides its expressive, more-than-life-size form. This is stated quite explicitly by Utpal Dutt when instead of locating any specific action in the existing social organization, he wants the liberty to expunge what actually happens in favour of the historic laws of class-struggle.

When we search in Utpal's theatre and theatre criticism for the content of "class truth", we come up again with a Lukacsian - Leninist-Stalinist combination of an economic notion of class as an objective category with a reflectionist notion of culture. Class can be ascertained in terms of occupation and ownership. To this straight forward economic notion of class is added the notion of an invariant historical law which exists objectively as an inherent principle of dynamism. This provides the basis on which the typicality of action and characterization of the play are structured. For any play to create myth, the degree of idealization and the resulting typicality must be high. This creates a problem by setting up a tension between the scheme of ideal action and typical characters and the semblance of daily life which fills out the play and provides a point of reference for the audience. This subordination of the social, the practical and the experiential to the ideal and the typical makes for great difficulties in constructing plays about actual class and class-struggle.

We will now examine some of the actual devices through which the mythic realism of Utpal Dutt represents class struggle. As we saw in the section on form, when mythic-realism has to be dramatized Utpal Dutt takes recourse to conventions of Bengali bourgeois theatre and a melodramatic version of Shakespeare. This version of Shakespeare, typified by the tradition of Henry Irving, reworked by directors such as Geoffrey Kendall, with its blend of melodrama and a maximum use of new stage technology, is his main source of inspiration. Discussed by Utpal in connection with Alamgir, it is a kind of speeded up, Elizabethan-Aristotelian structure, with

emotional ups and downs, a plot and multiple subplots, which however, hangs together by heroic and villainous actions of a few characters. The plentitude of emotions and incidents of such plays, their sheer quality, are supposed to represent an artistic version of the complexity of social reality. This is in keeping with the Aristotelian (or Elizabethan) bourgeois tradition in which reality must be represented as so many stories rather than as problems. In this dramatic or narrative convention the dramatist must have a complete story to tell, and the text as a whole is conceived as an interweaving of stories which all enrich one central story. Reality, when represented in this mode, is not relational or organizational, but rather a closed unit of a story with a beginning, middle and an end.

This type of closed narrative or dramatic construction that Utpal uses to create a self-contained mythic structure has been resisted from the early part of this century. A look at the debate on realism conducted among Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs and Bertolt Brecht as outlined Aesthetist Politics (ed. F. Nameson), shows Block and Brecht's objections to this type of representational form. Their criticism of Lukacs helps to throw light on the general problem created by the use of Aristotelian and neoclassical forms by communist realists. According to Brecht, the display of social reality as a "totality" betrays the nature of social reality, which for him is relational and not "total" or apprehensible as such from any locational vantage point. For the purpose of artistic representation which aims for an actual intervention rather than a neat interpretive construction, Brecht devised the episodic cum narrative form of epic theatre. He chose from the whole array of expressionist methods, a dramatic

equivalent of the *tâchnique* of montage, that is, a set of episodes that are juxtaposed or joined by a narrative, commenting and choric voice. This not only provoked the audience to work out the textual puzzle, but actually represented in formal terms the notion of class as social relations and surfaces, rather than self-contained prescribed essences that can be contained in fully rounded "mythic" forms. This continuously interrupted, continuously relating, juxtaposing form of Brecht's epic theatre challenged both the content and the forms of bourgeois society. Brecht's theatre began and ended in the middle so as to leave the plays as open-ended as possible, because the resolution of the episodic actions does not belong inside but outside of the theatre - in the political arena of society. For him the point of theatre was not to create myths but to demythologize.

Utpal Dutt's dramatic structure in general, and epic-mythic project in particular, contains all the representational devices that Brecht and recent playwrights such as Augusto Boal,⁴¹ for instance, find conservative and repressive. He has a causally organized "plot", with a fully rounded story with its accomplished action; he obeys the unities at times loosely. The multiplicity of emotions and incidents are marshalled to a certain interpretation which is to be taken as the "truth" about history. The action of the play demonstrates laws that work inwardly and inherently in history with their objective causality. There are no loose ends, no pieces. This accounts for the non-interrupted, non-interventionist structure of his plays, where the main theatrical device is dialogue. Therefore a chorus, or a commentator, though sometimes used for formal richness, is not

necessary. Where attempts are made at all to go beyond linearity, seriality and causality, to rework space-time relations or show a state of mind (for example in Dushapner Nagari, where Utpal uses poor poetry), it jars dreadfully with the rest of the play. It is the same in Tiner Talwar, with a fully conventional sequence of time, place, action and dialogue, where a few moments of fantasy are introduced to project the inner conflict of the director Benimadhab regarding the purpose of theatre. In fully linear plays, the jarring note of introduction of non-linear conventions merely serves to highlight the conventional, i.e., bourgeois, aspect of Utpal Dutt's theatre, as for example in the two above plays with psychologism and vision.⁴²

The hero of Utpal Dutt's epic mythic theatre is not of so distantly related to the superman. The movement of the action is utterly dependent on special individuals. This becomes apparent in many ways. In plays such as Stalin 34, Tota, Daraon Pathikbar, Ajeya Vietnam, etc., the heroic stature of the protagonistists is created not only through their own heroic actions, suffering etc., but by creating a contrasting set - the ordinary people - whose adoration of these characters gives us a signal of how to view them. The protagonistists are idealized and idolized simultaneously. This idolization is in keeping with the Aristotelian conventions of a glorious flaw (hamartia) - a flaw that even a hero may have - or he may even be completely flawless, as in the case of Stalin in the play of the same name. We are prompted to believe that dramatizing "class truth" very nearly amounts to creating an action-packed story of extraordinary individuals who create history through passionate and moral confrontations.

The characters in Utpal's plays are "essential" - i.e., "typical" representations. Thereby it is assumed that classes have fixed, objective essences which manifest as character traits in ideal or typical individuals. The character traits always pertain to the laws of class conflicts. For this reason working class, peasant, middle class and military heroes are hard to differentiate and share the same characteristics. Stalin and the 19th century peasant leader Titumir have essentially the same dialogue in the same language of heroism, courage and self-sacrifice. They speak as should all leaders of the people. Even the ruling class heroic figures transcend the interests and politics of their class and identify themselves with those below them, for a national cause. The heroes rising from within the lower classes, on the other hand, are some sort of "nature's aristocrats" or born leaders. The politics of mythic-epic is one of following the leader, who however does not need to understand history but embodies its principle. This mythic heroic figure is marked by vast, sweeping passions commensurable to the status of a spirit of an age or class. These feelings are suitably displayed through patriotism and heroism in battles (Tota), through patriotism, poetry and excessive temperament (Daraon Pathikbar), or dedication to socialist revolution (Stalin 1934 or Ajeya Vietnam). Empathy and admiration for a hero or a leader figure - both within and outside of the text - are the staples of Utpal's epic project. Feeling, not criticality, is here assumed as the agent of change, both for the characters and the audience.

This appeal to vast feelings or passions is meant to enliven the otherwise dull and abstract notion of the type,

and excite the audience into anger against tyranny. Utpal is insistent on the claim that all theatre, by which he means European and Indian, from Shakespeare to Ibsen or Gorky, is a grand attempt to create deep feelings in the audience. He indulges in frequent invectives and denunciations against the Bengali middle classes, particularly the poorer sectors, for their lack of passion. He thinks that the ability to feel has shrunk among the petty-bourgeoisie, thus deadening heroic impulses. This is the very 'cul-de-sac' of the petty-bourgeois life that he speaks of. In his eyes the emotions to be found among his middle class audience and actors provide no ground for political theatre.⁴³

On the other hand, he tells us that "the people" of Bengal, the peasantry, do not suffer from the atrophy of feelings that characterizes the middle classes. This his view of the people, or the "folk", as the primitive. "The people" inhabit the world of the "folk", or legends, of religious superstition and do not understand the restrictive standards of rationality, criticism and science. They are solely emotional.⁴⁴ Utpal Dutt justifies the excessive emotionalism of his plays by saying that "Political theatre has to stand in front of those little or half-educated audience who don't dissect madness [of Hamlet or Ophelia] under a bourgeois microscope".⁴⁵ Providing them with feelings rather than criticality is the only way to politically educate them. "We will have to take theatre to those who are sunk in the tradition of Ramayana and Mahabharata".⁴⁶ This sort of statement reads strangely in view of the fact that Utpal Dutt and the PLT actually perform the bulk of their shows through the year to petty bourgeois/middle class audiences.

"The people" and their imputed theatre habits seem to more than justifications for Utpal's own theatre habits and needs.

The excessiveness of feelings to which the members of Utpal's audience are encouraged through his theatre is supposed to testify to their political involvement. The collective political impact of a play is measured on the strength of feelings that it is able to evoke in the audience. Though Utpal Dutt claims an affinity between his theatre and the "total" and epic theatre of Irwin Piscator, with his stage of hundreds and all available productive forces, it is difficult not to point out that Piscator was critical, unheroic and severe - and not a member of the cult of feelings. The stage animator of the good Soldier Schweik, the teacher of Peter Weiss and Ralph Hochhuth, Piscator would have despised Utpal's glowing outbursts of patriotism, nationalism and folkism. It is interesting that in spite of the objectivity and economism of Utpal's concept of class, his ultimate reliance for political results of theatre is on something so subjective. It seems as though it is the motor of feelings rather than political organizations based on class that moves history. The objective laws and class essences can not otherwise have any dynamism which can be transformed into theatre. The politics of Utpal Dutt's theatre feeling is finally attached to an idealist, petty bourgeois morality which is activated by the way the story of class struggle is told. As Max Raphael put it in Proudhon, Marx, Picasso, the petty bourgeois revolutionary work of art stands as the mediating conscience between science and politics.⁴⁷ In the idealized scheme of class struggle, even when a story begins on the social terrain, an abstract and idealist formulation necessary for the mythic

quickly moves it from the realm of the political to that of the moral and the emotional - where the social and organizational specificity of the situation is expunged in favour of constructing an allegory of good fighting evil. Each history play thus loses its historicity and becomes an extended allegory, each political story a moral tale.

The type of realism then that emerges from this mythopoeic aesthetic is allegorical and iconic. The types that are deduced from the ideal laws of social dialectic are really more like icons of class, rather than even the individuals or characters in the bourgeois theatre tradition. If anything they smack of feudalism, of medieval morality plays where in the name of Shakespearean absolute and ideal moral categories (good or bad angel, mercy, seven deadly sins etc.) wrestled over the soul of Everyman as in Dushapner Nagari. The enactment of an ideal action, performed by idealized subjects or agents, imbued by moral conflicts, aiming to inspire the audience towards the correct politics, together form the core of Utpal Dutt's mythic-epic theatre. This idealized political scheme, which does not really leave much for the audience to do except to feel the right passions and adore the right hero and the leader, and follow him on his historical mission, is hardly the theatre which can stimulate and mobilize towards an active and popular class struggle. The bourgeois national element, both in content and form, and political intent, overdetermine class struggle. Utpal Dutt's eclectic and mainly bourgeois theatre, guided by socialist realism and revolutionary romanticism, parallels his eclectic and contradictory politics. Here we have a whole different range of politics within the parameter of bourgeois nationalism.

Ultimately we must remember that Utpal Dutt's purpose is to create myths by using an epic mode, as opposed to subjecting existing myths to the scrutiny of the epic form. We must also remember that he inherited this project of socialist myth-building from the tradition of socialist realism. It so happens that the Soviet agenda also sought to bring together socialism, patriotism and nationalism. And this could not be done by means of critical realism. In the Soviet Union, having a socialist government in place, bourgeois society and class struggle were considered things of the past, and certainly divisive in a situation where divisions existed not only between the left and the right, but also among the ranks of the left itself. Soviet cultural policy from the mid-1920s onwards is fraught with stronger and stronger directives to the writers to engage in the project of nation building, as well as to diffuse possibilities of class struggle at levels other than those which are explicitly economic and political. From Kollontai to proletcult, from Mayakovsky to Eisenstein, all were prevented from asking disturbing and divisive questions. What was required - and even Gorky tired to this after a short enthusiastic period - were forms which would be acceptable to bourgeois or semi-feudal tastes and distinctly carry on in a continuous tradition, but which would be instrumentally used to popularize a socialist economy and its state. The work of the myth-maker was to leave behind the grimy, sordid, immediate and the experiential - particularly at a social level - and project the view of a class-less society, an ideal class struggle. The utopianism of this cultural enterprise, needless to say, actually leaves intact bourgeois social formations. Class struggle takes place primarily at the level of economic

and political power. The conscious myth-building with a worker hero - whose visual equivalents are in the many communist political posters of the era - becomes a normative fantasy. Though it is supposed to serve as an encouragement for "the people", it can become a distant and unconnected image, if not at times a condemnation of what actually people are at any given point in time. It certainly does not tell one how to get to the ideal stage from the present one.

What seems to have been forgotten in this attempt to consciously create a national literature of socialism both in India and the Soviet Union is the fact that myths, even of proletarian revolution, can not be created by an individual choice, either by a limited number of persons or even a successful communist party. Even while disputing the notions of collective unconscious, and primal archetypes as the ground for myth - it is easily admissible that myths hold in suspension a common but contradictory set of practices and beliefs of large numbers of people over a long period of time and are not consciously advanced ideological tasks. Myths are not created for the purpose of creating myths, they develop out of existing stories. They are a combination of existing narratives, images, experiences and emotions - polyvalent significations - that have a patina of time and long use on them. Myths in that context are not meant to be inflated artistic generalizations, but highly nuanced particularities. To hide the specificity of the mundane and the everyday was never the purpose of myth, but to crystalize them in a revealing manner. Conscious mythic projects are at best redundant, at worst, due to the formal and epistemological compromises that have political implications, pernicious to

the cause of class struggle. A myth-building exercise is an ideological exercise and not a substitute for, or to be confused with, the culture of resistance which is thrown up in a popular process of class struggle, where myths happen. An artist can only produce her/his art, it becomes a myth by being inserted into a popular social and political process. If we keep this in mind then we can see how - for all of the reasons outlined so far - India's incomplete revolution could not be completed through such cultural projects as that of Utpal Dutt. His scheme of mythic realism is an aesthetic manifestation of his nationalist bourgeois socialism.

Footnotes

1. See Sudhi Pradhan, Marxist Cultural Movements in India, 3 Vols., on this theme.
2. Theatre Bulletin, May-June 1980, p.9 (my translation).
3. Ibid., p.9.
4. Ibid., p.10.
5. Theatre did not decline in popularity among those whose creation and vehicle of expression it had been since the 19th century. The ambiguity of the concept of Gananatya (people's theatre) had deepened further; finer shades of meaning were appearing between the two poles of "progressive" and "revolutionary" theatre that characterized the IPTA era. What it meant to be progressive or revolutionary became more complex - the terms "the people" and "the proletariat" were further unsettled in their connotations and relations. A whole host of new theatre philosophies evolved from the 1950s to now - philosophies that called themselves naba natak (new theatre), sat natak (honest theatre), anya natak (other theatre), thik natak (correct theatre), tritya natak (third theatre), "living theatre", along with, of course, the continuation of the older tradition of Gananatya (Peoples' theatre), a derivative of the left wing of IPTA, whose purpose continues to be the creation of a theatre for communist revolution, written from a "proletarian perspective".
6. A prolific play-wright, director and an actor both in theatre and films, and a theatre critic, he offers a spectacle of enormous energy, theatrical talent, a polemical temperament, and a commitment to the cause of communism in India. His plays both for jatra and stage, full length and one act, exceed fifty in number, and he has over half a dozen books of theatre criticism and elements of theatre. His group is the largest in non-commercial theatre and he edits a theatre magazine, Epic Theatre.
7. Utpal Dutt, "Little Theatre O Ami" / "Little Theatre and I" in Epic Theatre (May 1977): 52-3 (my translation).

8. Ibid., p.52.
9. Ibid., p.53.
10. See above article in Ibid., for details on this attempt to build a progressive theatre. The initial stage of his career, then, consisted of reviving and producing old classics and famous/good plays in general, both from India and abroad. This is a practice he still continues and he recently made a major point of rehabilitating Girish Ghosh for his nationalist content and a complex form. Utpal's range was large - it extended from Shakespeare's Macbeth, Othello, Midsummer Night's Dream, to Clifford Odet's Waiting for Lefty or As I Lay Dying, taking in Gorky's Lower Depths, Gogol's Inspector General, Simonov's The Russian Question, Tagore's Achalayatan / The Bastion /, Tapati, Michael Madhushudan Dutt's Buro Shaliker Ghare Ron / The Old Bird Sprouts New Feathers /, Dinabandhu Mitra's Sadhabar Ekadashi / A Wife's Wake for Her Living Husband /, Ibsen's Ghosts, Doll's House, etc. He translated and performed all the plays in Bengali. See also S. Dutt, Natya Andolaner Trish Bacchar, pp.112-116, and S.K. Mukherji, The Story of the Calcutta Theatre, pp.371-72.
11. Utpal Dutt, Towards a Revolutionary Theatre (TART), 1982, p. 34.
12. See Dilip Hiro, Inside India Today (1976); David Selbourne, An Eve to India (1977); and A. Mitra, Hoodlum Years (1979).
13. These full length plays complement Utpal's agit-prop and short propaganda plays on strikes, 'bandhs', election riggings, brutalities in panchayat (village self-government) elections and so on. They deepen the themes of repression and resistance. They clarify the direction of class struggle and the state formation in India and depict the vulnerability of the workers and peasants the lower middle class to the state of the national bourgeoisie and their allies, the landlords and jotedars.
14. Rustam Bharucha, Rehearsals of Revolution, p.xiii.
15. For the format of this type of drama criticism, see Brecht, Messionokaut Dialogues and Rabindranath Tagore, Panchabhut.

16. Japenda Japen ja, pp.13-14.
17. Utpal Dutt, TART, p.28.
18. Ibid., p.56.
19. Ibid., p.56.
20. Ibid., p.56.
21. Ibid., p.56.
22. This view of Stalin conveys a perception common in Indian communism throughout this century, despite the western view of him. Whatever may have happened in history, this popular myth of Stalin reveals much about the revolutionary goals and aspirations of Indian communism.
23. Lenin Kothai? [Where is Lenin?] (Act 1, Scene i). The CPI continued its support of Indira Gandhi even when the Emergency (1975-77) was imposed. Coming as the Emergency did after the years of Congress(I) terror and state repression against the CPI(M) and CPI(M-L) in West Bengal (1969-75), CPI's support was perceived by the left and democratic forces as a pure betrayal.
24. This incident and its consequences are discussed both by David Selbourne in An Eve to India and Dilip Hiro in Inside India Today.
25. Utpal Dutt in Towards a Revolutionary Theatre, pp.91-92 describes this situation in great detail and the importance of dramatizing this incident in view of rising fascist forces in India.
26. It has been remarked that Utpal Dutt's interest in Madhushudan is somewhat narcissistic. His own anglicized, upper class early life and theatre is followed by a return to Bengali theatre tradition and a communist politics. But these facts are important for us, since not only Utpal but the intelligentsia of India as a whole have shared this fate. Madhushudan's early and aggressive love for European culture, studying abroad, returning to hold a high position within the new socio-economic hierarchy, are things that middle and upper

class men routinely do or aspire to - even if they do not often convert to christianity and marry western women, and the reaction and anger which sends them "home" is a common phenomenon. M.K. Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Shri Aurobindo to M.V. Roy and countless others who turned to politics, both of the left and right wing variety, all share Madhusudan's history.

27. Tiner Talwar (1971), dedication.
28. Utpal Dutt, Tiner Talwar, Sc.1, p.2.
29. A term used by John Berger, "He is the spectator in front of the picture and he is presumed to be the man. Everything is addressed to him." John Berger, Ways of Seeing, p.54.
30. U. Dutt, Tiner Talwar, Sc.6 (1973), p.123.
31. Ibid., dedication page.
32. Epic Theatre, p.119.
33. U. Dutt, Tiner Talwar, Sc.8, p.129.
34. TART, p.34.
35. See TART; also Ritwik Ghatak, The Cinema and I (1987); Bijan Bhattacharya, "Reminiscences", in Gandharba (Autumn, 1982), (Bijan Bhattacharya Issue). Utpal Dutt's viewpoint in TART (chapter on "Political Theatre") is echoed by Ritwik Ghatak: "I have tackled the refugee problem, as you have used the term, not as a refugee problem. To me it was the division of a culture and I was shocked. During the partition period I hated these pretentious people who clamoured about our independence, our freedom. You kids are finished, you have not seen that Bengal of mine. I just kept on watching what was happening, how the behaviour pattern was changing due to this great betrayal of national liberation. And I probably gave vent to what I felt. Today I am not happy, and whatever I have seen unconsciously comes out in my films. My films may have been ridden with expressive slogan-mongering or they may be remote. But the cardinal point remains; that I am frustrated with what I see all around me. I am tired of it." (The Cinema and I, p.80),

36. Utpal Dutt, TART, p.61.
37. Ibid., p.59.
38. Bruce Franklin, The Essential Stalin (1972), p.60.
39. Ibid., p.80.
40. Ibid., pp.67-68.
41. Ibid., p.68.
42. Ibid., p.69.
43. Ibid., p.68.
44. Ibid., p.63.
45. See for example Bharucha, Rehearsals ...
46. Utpal Dutt, TART, p.64.
47. Ibid., p.64. Utpal Dutt however shows an awareness of the bourgeois potential of the People's Democratic Revolution (PDR).

"The danger is all the greater at the stage of people's democratic revolution, because the proletariat at this stage, repeats many of the slogans of the revolutionary bourgeois, such as industrialization, democratic rights, women's rights, land to the tiller and important role to play in moulding the masses' attitude to struggle, must not jump over the stage of democratic revolution and begin preaching socialism now, and yet must not lull the masses into surrendering to a bourgeois democracy." (Ibid., p.65).

But he does not let this glimpse into the problems of his and the CPI(M)'s political position develop into a real set of questions regarding the class character of the project, or how socialist/communist revolution may be stimulated while working towards the destination of a bourgeois revolution".

48. Maxim Gorky, "Soviet Literature", Collected Works, Vol.10, p.123.
49. Utpal Dutt, Stanislavsky Theke Brecht / From Stanislavsky to Brecht / (1982), p.82 (my translation, emphasis mine).
50. Ibid., pp.80-81 (emphasis mine).
51. Ibid., p.135.
52. Ibid., pp.124.135. See also Utpal Dutt, Shakespeareer Samaj Chetana / Shakespeare's Social Awareness / on the development of characters with three dimensions and complexity and an attempt to relate this with the rise of "the individual" as a part of capitalist development.
53. Utpal Dutt, Stanislavskir Path / Stanislavsky's Way / (1975), p.48 (my translation).
54. Maxim Gorky, "Soviet Literature", p.
55. Utpal Dutt, TART, pp.104-5.
56. Ibid., p.131.
57. Ibid., pp.131-32 (emphasis mine).
58. Utpal Dutt, Stanislavskir Path, p.23 (my translation).
59. Dutt, TART, p.133.
60. Dutt, Stanislavsky Theke Brecht, Chapter 2, pp.68-82.
61. Dutt, TART, p.109. For Utpal Dutt's admiration for Wagner see Ibid., pp.106-12. The need for myth creation among the bourgeois is outlined here: "To create new myths out of the old ones was the task set before German bourgeois thinkers for very precise reasons. The bourgeois in his frock-coat and cravat hurrying to his bank could not have been a very attractive figure to Goethe, Schiller and Lessing." (Ibid., p.112).
62. Ibid., p.106. Dutt also says : Drawing from a people's tradition and to recreate mythology in modern terms,

Wagner broke through the suffocating confines of the Opera of Manners and the polite misadventures of Figaro. This was new opera, the musical expression of the bourgeois democratic revolution." (TART, p.109, my emphasis).

To say the least that this view of Wagner is surprising and eccentric; Wagner and democracy, bourgeois or not, do not go together. The "folk" of Wagner are hardly what is meant by "the people" in a democratic political tradition. This view of Mozart's The Marriage of Figaro also indicates a complete misunderstanding of depiction of class in Mozart's operas.

63. Ibid., p.140.

64. Ibid., p.139.

65. Ibid., p.134.

66. See S. Pradhan, Marxist Cultural Movement, 3 Vols., and D. Das, Marxbadi Sahitya Bishayak Baktrita / Marxist Literary Debates / (4 vols.). The aesthetics of socialist realism and revolutionary romanticism mainly reached Bengal through Gorky's literary, dramatic and critical works, and that of Nikolai Ostrovsky's plays and novels, for example, How the Steel was Tempered. Gorky's Mother, for example, became the model for socialist literature in India. Theatre magazines such as Bohurupee, Theatre Bulletin, Epic Theatre, Group Theatre, to name a few well known and long lasting ones, along with a host of small theatre and cultural magazines still discuss the issues of culture and politics, thrown up by the enterprise of socialist realism.

67. Dutt, TART, p.113 (emphasis mine).

68. M. Gorky, "A Talk with Young Writers", Collected Works, Vol.10.

69. M. Gorky, Ibid.

70. M. Gorky, Collected Works, Vol.10, p.41. It is this romanticism rather than criticality that is also Utpal's political tool. This is a positive romanticism, a socially mythic use of imagination that Gorky (and others) found to be absent in bourgeois society since the late 19th century. As he put it: "... faculty of

imagining is totally lost in the present bourgeois society." The positive use of this faculty of imagination, once the faculty of the young and vigorous early bourgeois, now in decay, now belonged to the communist writer, for creating a revolutionary romantic myth. And for Gorky, the heart of this new mythic endeavour is the revolutionary hero - who is a class type and should have a stature that is more than life-size. He embodies a vital force, namely productive labour. So for Gorky, unlike for Utpal Dutt, the heroes do not arise from old epics or classes other than the proletarian. As he says:

"We must make labour the principal hero of our books, i.e., man organized by labour processes, which, in our country, are equipped with the might of modern techniques, and is, in his turn, making labour easier and more productive, and raising it to the level of an art. We must learn to understand labour as a creative act. Creativity is a concept which we writers use too often and with hardly the right to do so. Creativity is that degree of intensity in the work of the memory at which the rapidity of its operation produces from its store of knowledge and impressions the most outstanding and characteristic facts, pictures and details, and puts them into the most precise and vivid words that all can understand. Our young literature cannot yet boast of that quality. Our writers' store of impressions and knowledge is not extensive, and one does not yet discern a striving to build up and extend and deepen that store." (Collected Works, Vol.10, p.333).

Utpal Dutt and Bengali communist writers also learnt the concept of "type" from the writers of the Stalinist era :

"The art of literary creativity, which is concerned with the fashioning of characters and "types", calls for imagination and inventiveness. If, in depicting a shopkeeper, a civil servant, or a worker of his acquaintance, the writer has produced what is a more or less faithful photograph of just one person, that will be nothing more than a photograph, without the least social or educative significance, and will do almost nothing to extend our knowledge of man or life.

"If, however, the writer proves able to summarize the most characteristic class features, habits, tastes, gestures, beliefs and manner of speech peculiar to

twenty, fifty, or even a hundred shopkeepers, civil servants or workers, proves able to epitomize and condense them in the person of a single shopkeeper, civil servant or worker, he thereby creates a type, and that is art." (Ibid., p.32).

Both for Gorky and Dutt, the mythic hero is a "type" fashioned from "an abstraction of a fundamental idea" rather than that of a person. But the theatrical/literary actualization process differed vastly between them.

71. Utpal Dutt, Chaer Dhoan (1979), pp.25-26 (italics and translation mine).
72. Dutt, Stanislavsky Theke Brecht, p.95 (emphasis and translation mine).
73. See "Short Organum" in Willett, Brecht on Theatre.
74. Jerzy Grotowski, Towards a Poor Theatre (1968), p.19. For Grotowski's working definition of 'rich' theatre, see pp.15-25.
75. Dutt, Chaer Dhoan, p.112 (my translation).
76. Ibid., p.112.
77. Ibid., p.113.
78. See Ibid., p.54 and chapters on stage, sets, light and music for a full presentation of Utpal's theatre aesthetic.
79. The epic theatre theories and practices of Piscator are influential for Utpal, though a very fundamental difference exists between the two both aesthetically and politically. Utpal Dutt refers frequently to his achievements, and begins the chapter on "Revolutionary theatre" with a quotation from Piscator. See Piscator's The Political Theatre : A History 1914-1929 (1978), pp.185-99, for his own description of his theatre intentions and use of the stage. For Piscator, the politics of his "total" or "epic" theatre centres on the following proposition :

"For us, man portrayed on the stage is significant as a social function. It is not his relationship to himself, nor his relationship to God, but his relationship to

society which is central. Whenever he appears, his class or social stratum appear with him." (p.187)

As outlined in the above-mentioned pages, Piscator used a vast amount of technology for his stage, and film technology also, such as projected films, slides, overheads, etc., to produce an effect of the complex social environment in which his characters actually existed. His theatre was also called by him a "sociological theatre", and a "documentary theatre". See also Willett (ed.), Brecht on Theatre, pp.65-66 and pp.77-81. The form, interest in his stage and technology, were related. As Brecht put it, "concern with subject and concern with form are complementary. Seen from inside the theatre it appears that progress in theatrical techniques is only progress when it helps to realize the material; and the same with progress in playwriting." (p.24). Their technical/theatre innovations Brecht called "front-line battles" (p.65). For a simple, somewhat de-politicizing account of Piscator's theatre, see G.D. Innis, Erwin Piscator's Political Theatre (1972).

80. The tradition of jatra had already been used in the 19th century theatre of nationalist politics. The political jatra of Mukunda Das had been in great force in the countryside of Bengal throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Since then however, jatra has waned as a political theatre even rurally. When Utpal Dutt turned to jatra therefore, it was not exactly a new experiment - except that it was a novelty for an intellectual within IPTA and the communist tradition to do so. Dutt enriched his own theatre through this, but also further re-politicized jatra. He revived a late 19th century form of chorus called juri, a group of musician-singers dressed in long black coat and turban, and used them as commentators - as was their role during late 19th and early 20th century. He also used vivek or conscience - a jatra convention - to interrupt the action/narration to depict internal conflict within a character or for a moral-political comment. Bharucha is right in pointing out that the enormous scope of jatra - with its "tumultuous and intoxicating atmosphere evocation" (p.93), its bold character types, highly formalized projective style of acting - all suited Utpal Dutt's taste and purpose of constructing a grand theatre. See Bharucha, Rehearsals, pp.90-4, for a brief account of Utpal Dutt's relationship with an urban commercial version of this form.

81. For his immediate practical politics, the street theatre becomes his chosen form. The conventional proscenium stage is here substituted by election campaign platforms, street corners, open fields etc. No stage, no illusion effects, no sets are used here. If the performance is at night there is a uniform lighting by petroleum lamps and the audience sits very close to the acting space, surrounding it, usually on three sides. But interestingly enough he speaks or theorizes very little about these new and different theatrical experiments. Instead from these experiences he gathers tips for what to put in his more overtly theatrical production - both by the way of content and form. It is remarkable that with his continuous participation in theatre outside of an auditorium and the proscenium he never developed this form of politicized the spectator-performer relations it implies. That this theatre is simply considered functional by Utpal himself puts it out of our main discussion on him, except to remark that next to his epic project, it takes on a perfunctory and at times a caricature-like quality.
82. See Chaer Dhoan, "Alamgir O Janapryata", pp.30-1. The play was originally written during the first half of the 1920s, and performed as a nationalist piece by famous director-actors such as Shishir Bhaduri.
83. Ibid., p.30 (my translation).
84. Constantin Stanislavsky, Building a Character (1981) outlines his theory of acting, notion of "psycho-technique" and speaks of the complete reliance of actors immersion into the character and his/her own psychic resources - "living according with natural laws" (p.288); this acting relies on our "organic nature" (p.287).
85. Dutt, Stanislavskir Path, p.3. Utpal Dutt misinterprets Stanislavsky's demand of profound self-awareness, being in touch with psychic "natural" resources to the loss of self. He says "An arrogant person can never be an actor" (p.3), but deduces from this that "the precondition for being an actor is a loss one's own ego" (p.3). He suggests on the same page methods such as, not Stanislavsky's "psycho-technique", etc., but "sweeping the stage, moving or placing the furniture, selling programs." These for him "help to destroy the initial arrogance." "Physical labour is the greatest enemy of the ego" (p.3).

86. Using a bourgeois form to advance worker's struggle, for Rustam Bharucha for instance, is both a contradiction and a gross manipulation. However, he does not go beyond this position by exploring what this so-called manipulation actually consists of, because he does not attend to the particularities of the Indian communist movement or to Utpal's intention, which combine a bourgeois nationalist project with class struggle. Instead Bharuche in his chapter on Utpal Dutt, invokes the cliché that all Marxist art is propagandist and therefore, by nature inherently dishonest and unconcerned with the relationship of end to means. See Bharucha, Rehearsals.

87. See Utpal Dutt, TART, Chapter 1.

88. The most important political objection to linear totalist narrative in the last two decades has come from the work of Brazilian playwright in exile, Augusto Boal. In his The Theatre of the Oppressed (1979), which arose out of practices of political consciousness-raising, Boal spoke out against the totalist Aristotelian form. Finding it in existence from the Greek tragedies to now, Boal saw it as a tool of class repression for its linear structure, its use of catharsis for distancing and pacifying the audience, and thus vindicating the existing order. According to him, "Aristotle's coercive system of tragedy survives to this day thanks to its great efficacy". As he puts it :

"His system appear in disguised form on television, in the movies, in the circus, in the theatres. It appear in many and varied shapes and media. But its essence does not change : it is designated to bridle the individual, to adjust him to what pre-exists. If this is what we want, the Aristotelian system serves the purpose better than any other; if on the contrary, we want to stimulate the spectator to transform his society, to engage in revolutionary action, in that case we will have to seek another poetics." (p.47)

The proscenium and art theatre, i.e., bourgeois theatre, according to Boal, "divided the people, separating actors from spectators", into "people who act and people who watch", distanced "the protagonists from the

mass", and created "the private property of the characters by the individual actors". (p.119).

89. In one play where the introduction of several episodes that violate space-time sequence and the internal logic of the situation or action does not produce a jarring effect as described above is Daraon Pathikbar. Generally Utpal Dutt's style does not vary. No matter what the story is about, and from what time in history it comes, it is always told in the same way.
90. He appeals to intense passions instead, which might inspire the fainthearted Bengali petty bourgeoisie to rise to a revolutionary stature. It is not criticality or analysis but with feelings that he wants to spur them on. It is the narrowness and atrophy of passions that he wants to attack. Towards a Revolutionary Theatre, his article in the Epic Theatre, in fact all of his critical writings, are full of contempt for the petty bourgeois "little man" with his "little feelings", his dialect accent, and his "uncultured" existence in which he thinks that Mozart is a brand of firearms. See TART, p.12 and Epic Theatre, Vol.3, p.13. The epic project then consists of bringing this dead audience back to life by giving a taste of strong feelings.
91. See Dutt, Stanislavsky Theke Brecht, Chapter 3.
92. Dutt, Epic Theatre, Vol.3, p.13 (my translation).
93. Ibid., p.13 (emphasis mine).
94. Max Raphael, Proudhon, Marx, Picasso : Three Studies in the Sociology of Arts (1979).

