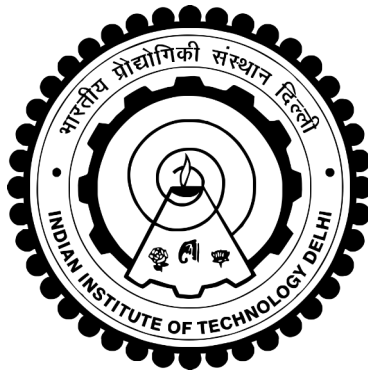


**BADAL SIRCAR AND BEYOND:
THIRD THEATRE NETWORK IN WEST BENGAL,
1971 – PRESENT**

SANDIP DEBNATH



DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY DELHI
NEW DELHI, INDIA**

APRIL 2022

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**BADAL SIRCAR AND BEYOND:
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Dissertation submitted by

SANDIP DEBNATH

of the

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

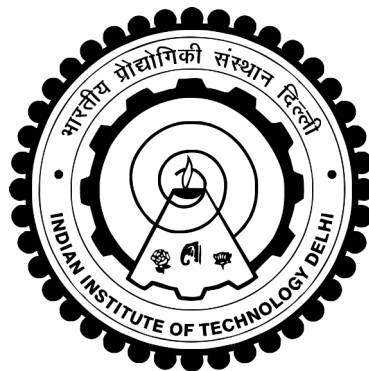
under the supervision of

ARJUN GHOSH

in fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

to the



**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY DELHI
NEW DELHI, INDIA**

APRIL 2022

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Badal Sircar and Beyond: Third Theatre Network in West Bengal, 1971 – Present,**” being submitted by Sandip Debnath to the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (IIT Delhi) for the award of the degree of “**Doctor of Philosophy,**” is a record of bona fide research work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance and is in conformity with the rules and regulations of IIT Delhi.

He has fulfilled all the requirements for the submission of this thesis which has, in my opinion, reached the required standard of fulfilling the requirements for the degree.

To the best of my knowledge, the material contained in this thesis has not been submitted, in part or in full, to any other University or Institute for the award of any other degree or diploma.

Arjun Ghosh

Professor

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Indian Institute of Technology Delhi

New Delhi

India

Date:

In the service of humanity...

Also, to those who believed in me and my work

and

those dreamers who still differentiate research from degree.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Every research has a bitter-sweet story behind it. Here is a glimpse of the green-room of this one. Continuing for more than a decade now, the list to express gratitude seems unending. I will try to keep it as short as possible. Hope you will bear with me.

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regard. While my academic introduction to him was through his works almost a decade earlier and five years back he became my guide, now I feel a close familiarity. To me, now, he is Arjun-da, in letter and spirit.

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CoVid-19 has imposed lockdowns and restrictions. At present, I feel lucky enough to have joined the Department when it was bustling with academic and co-curricular activities all around, when we could engage in hours of discussion (sometimes leading to debates) over food and drinks, especially over the evening tea/coffee. I am also reminded of our collective

efforts when we voiced our opinions and grievances, as students and as concerned citizens. I fondly recall my friends at the Department and in the Institute, especially Late Alan Stanley, Angarika, Debarshi, Debottam, Jatin, Jyotirmay, Lalita, Mriganka-da, Neha Singh, Nikhil, Preeti, Rajdeep, Ravi Chakraborty, Ravi Prakash, Rituparna Kaushik, Rituparna Sengupta, Riyaz, Robin, Sandip Dutta, Sania, Satanik, Shinod, Siddharth, Suchismita, Sumallya, and Urooj among many others, with much nostalgia.

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Access to archives, online or offline, pose one of the greatest challenges to research in India. And this is true even for IIT Delhi which stands as one of the best research institutions in India, and even though it is located in the national capital. However, the inter-library loan facility through DELNET have been quite a help. In such a situation, publicly accessible online resources made available under Creative Commons license, have been crucial. For this research, I am highly indebted to Nātya Shodh Sansthan, Kolkātā. I specifically thank Chhanda Samaddar, Krishna Mukherjee, Dhruva Sengupta, Shibu-da, and Raju-da for their prompt and constant support. Natrang Pratisthān, New Delhi; Sāhitya Akādemi, New Delhi; Sangeet Nātak Akādemi, New Delhi; School of Cultural Texts and Records, Jādvapur University have also provided me useful resources. I thank the librarians of the Central Library and the Library of the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University for allowing me access to the dissertations submitted to the University and were under embargo. I also thank Rahul Sen of Paschimbango Nātyo Akādemi Library and Ratri Chattopadhyay of Shāntipur Sānskritik for giving me copies of some out-of-print journals.

That I have continued to pursue academics as a career is because of two people, both of whom I had met during my Masters. One of them is Late Professor Manju Dutta Gupta and

the other is one of my best friends, Sayantan Roy Moulick. I feel fortunate to have known them closely and that they believed, and convinced me to believe, in my academic potential.

The members of my family are indeed a blessing. My mother has always been an inspiration to me – through her work, through her presence, and in her absence since 2007. My gratefulness for my father's unwavering faith in me is inexpressible through words and I do not really know how to thank my wife, Saswati, either. This work is as much of her as it is mine. For all these years of research she has stood by me. Braving the struggles all alone, she has provided me the conditions favourable in fulfilling my academic pursuit. I could not have even started this research without their support.

The people mentioned in these pages, and many more whom I could not specifically acknowledge here in this already overflowing section, are remembered in deep gratitude and in fond memory. I am the one who should be held responsible for all unintended errors herein.

ABSTRACT¹

Over the last five decades Third Theatre has become a distinct and recognisable cultural force as a non-party Left free theatre movement, especially in Calcutta (Kolkātā since 2001) and across several districts of West Bengal, India. However, existing studies on Third Theatre have primarily focused on Badal Sircar and the group he had established – Satābdī. This work, in contrast, brings to the fore the collaboration among the Third Theatre groups at various levels – preparation, performance, and outreach. The study also takes into consideration the audience patrons, who stand in support of the “movement” and, thus, form a part of the network. As such, my study presents a critical enquiry of that which has hitherto remained outside the purview of literary and theatre studies concerning the Third Theatre, during the lifetime of Sircar and even afterwards.

This dissertation offers an insight into how this theatre network functions and the nature of collaboration. Drawing references from Third Theatre workshops, performances, archival records, interviews, discussions, and the like, I demonstrate that both intra and inter-group collaboration is essential to this theatre movement. The groups not only perform together, organise theatre festivals, and invite the allied groups to perform in the localities of each other, but they produce plays collaboratively, provide support as replacement casts, and also conduct workshops and study-circles together. The strength of Third Theatre, therefore, generates not from any particular individual or group but the organisation, the network. The intrinsic “familiality” renders its imprint on the Third Theatre productions and also transforms their cultural activism into a “movement.”

Hence, I argue that the network supports the Third Theatre Movement organisationally and aesthetically. Moreover, it is through the network that the Third Theatre

1 The Hindi version which follows is a translation of the English original. In cases of confusion, this will prevail.

groups gain their “political” identity, an agency, as well as a legitimacy. This, in turn, enables Third Theatre to stand as a cultural force behind the people’s movements. Thus, while being embedded within a larger socio-political and cultural framework, I contend that Third Theatre does play an agentive role as a weapon of social transformation, however minimal that be in the grand schema of affairs.

सार²

पिछले पांच दशकों में थर्ड थिएटर एक गैर-पार्टी वाम मुक्त थिएटर आंदोलन के रूप में एक विशिष्ट और पहचानने योग्य सांस्कृतिक शक्ति बन गया है, विशेष रूप से कलकत्ता (२००१ से कोलकाता) और पश्चिम बंगाल (भारत) के कई जिलों में। हालाँकि, थर्ड थिएटर पर मौजूदा अध्ययनों ने मुख्य रूप से बादल सरकार और उनके द्वारा स्थापित "शताब्दी" पर ध्यान केंद्रित किया है। इसके विपरीत, यह शोध प्रबंध थर्ड थिएटर समूहों के बीच विभिन्न स्तरों - तैयारी, प्रदर्शन, और पहुंच - पर सहयोग को सामने लाता है। यह अध्ययन दर्शक-संरक्षकों को भी ध्यान में रखता है, जो "आंदोलन" के समर्थन में खड़े होते हैं और इस प्रकार, नेटवर्क का एक हिस्सा बनते हैं। मेरा अध्ययन उस की एक आलोचनात्मक जांच प्रस्तुत करता है जो अब तक थर्ड थिएटर से संबंधित साहित्य और रंगमंच अध्ययन के दायरे से बाहर रहा है, बादल सरकार के जीवनकाल के दौरान और उसके बाद भी।

यह शोध प्रबंध थिएटर नेटवर्क कैसे कार्य करता है, और उस में सहयोग की प्रकृति कैसी होती है, उसका एक अंतर्दृष्टि प्रदान करता है। थर्ड थिएटर कार्यशालाओं, प्रदर्शनों, अभिलेखों, साक्षात्कारों, चर्चाओं और इसी तरह के अन्य संदर्भों से मैं प्रदर्शित करता हूँ कि इस रंगमंच आंदोलन के लिए समूहों के अंत तथा अंतर सहयोग दोनों आवश्यक हैं। थर्ड थिएटर समूह न केवल एक साथ नाट्य प्रदर्शन करते हैं, नाट्योत्सव आयोजित करते हैं, और संबद्ध समूहों को एक-दूसरे के इलाकों में प्रदर्शन करने के लिए आमंत्रित करते हैं, बल्कि वे सहयोगात्मक रूप से नाटकों का निर्माण करते हैं, प्रतिस्थापन कलाकारों के रूप में सहायता प्रदान करते हैं, और एक साथ कार्यशालाओं और अध्ययन-मंडलियों का संचालन भी करते हैं। इसलिए, थर्ड थिएटर की ताकत किसी व्यक्ति विशेष या समूह से नहीं बल्कि संगठन, यानी नेटवर्क से उत्पन्न होती है। यह आंतरिक "पारिवारिकता" थर्ड थिएटर प्रस्तुतियों पर अपनी छाप प्रदान करती है, और उनकी सांस्कृतिक सक्रियता को "आंदोलन" में बदल देती है।

2 यह हिंदी संस्करण पूर्ववर्ती अंग्रेजी मूल का अनुवाद है। दुविधा की स्थिति में, अंग्रेजी मूल को सही समझा जाना चाहिए।

इस हेतु, मेरा तर्क है कि नेटवर्क थर्ड थिएटर आंदोलन को संगठनात्मक और सौंदर्य दोनों रूप से सशक्त बनाता है। इसके अलावा, नेटवर्क के माध्यम से ही थर्ड थिएटर समूह अपनी "राजनीतिक" पहचान, एक एजेंसी, साथ ही एक वैधता प्राप्त करते हैं। यह, बदले में, थर्ड थिएटर को जन आंदोलनों के पीछे एक सांस्कृतिक शक्ति के रूप में खड़ा होने में सक्षम बनाता है। इस प्रकार, एक बड़े सामाजिक-राजनीतिक और सांस्कृतिक ढांचे के भीतर अंतर्निहित होने के बावजूद, मेरा तर्क है कि थर्ड थिएटर, कितना भी न्यूनतम हो, सामाजिक परिवर्तन के हथियार के रूप में एक सक्रिय भूमिका निभाता है।

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ABBREVIATIONS

Acronyms of Theatre Groups/ Organisations/ Forums/ Allied Bodies	
ALT	Alternative Living Theatre
ATG	Arena Theatre Group (later, Angan Theatre Group)
A-PAT	Ashoknagar People's Art Theatre
FITA	Forum for Intimate Theatre Activists
FOTO	Federation of Theatre of the Oppressed
HāSāS	Hālīshahar Sānskritik Sansthā
IPTA	Indian People's Theatre Association
Janam	Jana Nātya Manch
NCCC	North Calcutta Cultural Commune
NSD	National School of Drama, New Delhi
NSS Archive	Nātya Shodh Sansthan, Kolkātā
RADA	Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, London
SNA	Sangeet Nātak Akādemi
SRC	Shri Ram Centre
STQ	Seagull Theatre Quarterly
TPG	The Performance Group (Richard Schechner)
UTC	(Could not be gathered)

Other Acronyms	
ABTA	All Bengal Teachers' Association
AIPSF	All India Progressive Students' Federation
AIPWA	All India Progressive Writers' Association
BBD Bāg	Binoy-Badal-Dinesh Bāg (Garden or Park)
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BS	Bānglā San (Bengali Calendar Year)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency, USA
CIIL	Central Institute of Indian Languages
CPI	Communist Party of India (Undivided until 1964)
CPIM	Communist Party of India – Marxist
CPIML	Communist Party of India – Marxist-Leninist

Other Acronyms	
GST	Goods and Services Tax
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
INC	Indian National Congress
IPC	Indian Penal Code
IPF	Indian People's Front
ISW	Institute of Social Work
MNC	Multi-national Corporation
NGO	Non-government Organisation
NRC	National Register of Citizens
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
PDSF	Progressive Democratic Students' Federation
RBC College	Rishi Bankim Chandra College
SCTR	School of Cultural Texts and Records, Jadavpur University
SFI	Students' Federation of India
TMC	Trinamool Congress
TO	Theatre of the Oppressed
UK	United Kingdom
USA/ US	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WBSU	West Bengal State University
YCI	Youth Cultural Institute

Other Shortened/ Short Expressions	
Academy	Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkātā
Angan	Anganmancho
Bhārangam	Bhārat Rang Mahotsav, Annual National Theatre Festival organised by NSD
Sircar	Badal Sircar

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NOTE ON DOCUMENTATION, TRANSLITERATION, AND TRANSLATION

This dissertation follows the “Notes and Bibliography” format of the seventeenth edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Any variation from the same has been followed throughout the dissertation.

The usual spelling of names of persons and familiar words/phrases, in English or otherwise, have been retained. Other spelling variants used for the references in Indian languages have been noted in the Appendices. I have used “ā” for “long a” and “o” for the lip-rounded sound variation in Bengali (Bānglā). Other than that, “ī” and “ū” have been used to refer to the longer counterparts of “i” and “u,” respectively.

Texts originally published in Bānglā, English, and Hindi have been referred to in their first language of publication, alongside their translations, when available and if required. Translations of all such texts have been done by the author from the original, except where noted otherwise. For texts originally published in Sanskrit, the original texts have been referred to but the standard available English translations have been used and noted likewise. For texts originally published in any other language, only their English translations have been referred to and used.