

IPTA and National Identity: History, Theatre and a Culture of Touring

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Abstract:

Over the past decades there has been a growing interest in the historiography of Modern Indian Theatre. This paper is an attempt to focus on one of the most dynamic moments in the history of Modern Indian Theatre, the emergence of the Indian People's Theatre Association. The formation of IPTA in 1943 is an event of immense historical significance that needs greater critical inquiry. I attempt a review of the history of the IPTA with a focus on its theatre and show how the IPTA in its activist stance towards anti-colonial rule was also a key factor in imagining an emerging nation. IPTA's diverse theatrical oeuvre, including plays like Sambhu Mitra's *Nabanna* was instrumental in the construction of national identity. I also argue that despite its organizational decentralization, IPTA's role in the imagining of the nation became possible because of a crucial ploy of 'touring', what I refer to as a 'culture of touring'.

Keywords: IPTA, Modern Indian Theatre, historiography, National Identity, *Nabanna*, Culture of Touring.

With the achievement of political independence in 1947 and the end of British rule, India stepped on to a phase of massive reconstruction of the nation. This was a project of asserting an identity, of simultaneous reconstruction and deconstruction, of decolonization and a rising postcolonial practice in various ways. The achievement of a political independence was thus a significant culturally demarcative historical moment that split opened a pre-independent and a post-independent ethos into positions of binarizations.

The complex post-independence phase was chiefly guided by the quest for a 'national' identity, free from colonial structures. Nehru's 'tryst with destiny' was a massive project

anticipating the consolidation of the nation that would break away from colonial pasts and reclaim herself. The newly emerged state had to focus on economic development, planning and education among others with an emphasis on the development of a distinct national identity which in turn would be underlined by the presence of the state in everyday life:

Nehru made government the centre of the newly independent nation by expanding it and making it responsible for everything, from jobs, ration cards and industrial growth to a national education policy and the promotion of a 'national culture'. Government became part of the daily life of its citizens and part of their thinking in a way that no political organization had ever been before (Mee 180).

Through central government institutions like the Planning Commission led by Nehru himself, the initial focus lay on the construction of the political and cultural identity of the nation. The quest for a national identity, the effort to realize the distinctive quality about India became the driving force during these early years after independence. The effort was spirited enough, but there was hardly any specific idea about the path to be taken. Given the sheer diversity that India has always stood for, the construction of a cohesive entity of the nation that was nevertheless all set to emerge was an uphill task. Instead of romanticized versions of the Nehruvian vision of a united India, recent historians point to the rather imprecise and hazy nature of the idea of a national identity that was sufficiently complicated by political choices and conflicts within the democracy. Sunil Khilnani, for example, looks at the moment of Independence from a distinctive objective glance. He points out that when the Congress came to power, "...the circumstances were ones of uncertainty and crisis. The nationalist elite in command of the state had to act in a society alive with aspirations, divided between differing conceptions of who the nation was and what the state should do" (29). While recognizing the huge impact of Nehru's career in the shaping of a modern India, Khilnani also points out that "the settled coherence of the Nehru era is in fact a retrospective mirage" adding that Nehru, "had no clear doctrinal plan of action, nor was there anything like a consensus, within either his party or the society at large, to impart cohesion" (30). The complex scope of any idea about national identity thus has to be located within these paradoxical positions swaying between a constructed and apparent cohesiveness which tends to be frustrated by the lack of any specific goal about how to achieve that cohesiveness. Many post-independence enterprises often lacked this focus about national identity and apparently shared the Nehruvian lack of vision as well. The Indian People's Theatre Association (henceforth referred to as IPTA), as I argue below, could also be seen as an institution that was grappling with its notions about national identity and the question how such an identity could be 'constructed' through theatre and performance. Though ideologically poles apart, Nehru's quest or 'discovery' of India could be equated with the IPTA's quest for a new theatre and a national identity that in turn would indicate interesting interpretive possibilities.

If the quest for a national culture formed the backdrop to state enterprises, in the theatre, the quest for a national identity was subsumed by the quest for the language and form of the theatre, of developing new idioms of expression. This necessity, the urge to look for new modes of expression informs the practice of an emerging modern Indian theatre. In fact, global histories of performance point to the fact that whenever there is a major historical and socio-cultural transformation, theatrical and performative expressions look for newer modes and idioms of translating that experience. For India, the moment of independence had been such a historic phase which greatly transformed ways of seeing. Theatre practitioners began

asking questions and looked for solutions in their practice. Badal Sircar, for example, asked significant questions about his own identity and position as a playwright at this critical juncture, leading on to larger debates about the theatrical quest, the individual quest and national identity: “Who am I? ...Where do I belong in this complex social structure in this complex world? What are my times? What is my language? What is my theatre? What is the language of my theatre?” (Sircar 9) In these series of questions and their possible answers lay embedded the blueprint of the post independence theatrical practice in India that would equally engage with the question of national identities. As rapid transformations were imminent in politics and society, modern Indian theatre too would look for newer idioms for communicating such changes and in the process also concern themselves with crucial questions about the nation and national identity.

The several ramifications of the post independence modern Indian theatre and its diverse modes of expression are beyond the scope of this paper. I turn back at this moment to a phase just before the achievement of India’s independence, in the emergence of the Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA). I would argue that the roots of the quest of a modern Indian post-independence theatre’s identity and form lay in the IPTA. Again, it was because of the IPTA’s activist stance that a national identity vis-a-vis theatre was forged that eventually played an important role in India’s achievement of independence. I further seek to show how IPTA crucially sustains the sense of nationalist bonding through a culture of touring that allowed a unique culture of exchange between diverse people and their diverse performance forms.

Most recent studies on Indian theatre historiography have acknowledged the immense significance of the establishment of the Indian People’s Theatre Association in 1943 in the evocation of a nationalist ideology through performance (Bhatia 2004, Dharwadker 2005, Dalmia 2006, Mee 2008). This comes as a necessary intervention in Indian theatre historiography that had largely neglected the role of the IPTA. The IPTA was the first pan-Indian community in theatre and related arts and certainly an important institution that brought together artists from different parts of India for a common cause. Yet this was not a government sponsored movement and remains a brilliant collective effort of nationalism. The activities of the IPTA could be seen as an activist-nationalist phase in the search for an Indian theatre that concerns itself with the rights and privileges of a colonized people. In an article published in the 1997 issue of the *India International Centre Quarterly*, the late Zohra Segal recalls her association with the Prithvi Theatres and IPTA activity in Bombay, aptly entitling her essay as, ‘Theatre and Activism in the 1940s’.

It is with an activist spirit that the IPTA embarked on to the cause of liberation. The IPTA was activist from the outset and was committed to protest against “The external aggression by the fascist hordes...and internal repression by an alien Government which seeks to hold our people in subjection and prevents them from organizing an effective defence of their own home-land” (Draft resolution of the IPTA conference, May 1943)¹. The aim of the IPTA, as mentioned in the draft resolution, was to mobilize “a people’s theatre movement throughout the whole of India” which would in turn serve as the “organizer of our people’s struggle for freedom, economic justice and a democratic culture” (Pradhan 129). With a priority to the masses, the IPTA thus had a two-edged goal that blended global and local concerns. On the one hand, it was anti-fascist, and on the other it was anti-colonial. With these two goals in mind, the IPTA sought for a revival of Indian culture, tradition and its folk through

performing arts. Writing in 1951, Mulk Raj Anand attempts to define an Indian theatre vis-à-vis folk theatre:

As we adapt our knowledge of the survivals of the old folk theatre to the needs of today, it is possible that a new indigenous tradition of the Indian theatre may be built which is unique to our country and which may contribute something different to the hackneyed forms current in the contemporary European theatre (60).

Anand, indeed, had been one of the founder members of the IPTA and by that time the IPTA had taken major strides in recovering Indian folk traditions beyond their immediate contexts. The first bulletin of the IPTA, *Historical Background* issued in July 1943, proclaimed that:

The Indian People's Theatre Association has been formed to co-ordinate and strengthen all the progressive tendencies that have so far manifested themselves in the nature of drama, songs and dances. It is not a movement which is imposed from the above but one which has its roots deep down in the cultural awakening of the masses of India; nor is it a movement which discards our rich cultural heritage, but one which seeks to revive the lost in that heritage by reinterpreting, adopting and integrating it with the most significant facts of our people's lives and aspirations in the present epoch...it stands for justice and democratic culture (qtd in Dalmia 161).

While the formative impulse of the IPTA was to revive a lost heritage, its assertion that "it stands for justice and democratic culture" is of no less significance because such a stand aligns a people's theatre movement with modernity, a modernity that is inspired by modern and progressive transformations in Europe. The background to the formation of the IPTA had been, globally, World War II and the rise of resistance to Fascism, and locally, the freedom struggle against the British. The famine in Bengal (1943) gave further impetus to the movement.

Back in Europe, the 1930s had been witnessing the demand for the author's greater social and political responsibility towards his/her society. Fascism was on the rise and so were organized protests against fascism. There was also global reaction to the great economic depression of 1929. Under these circumstances the International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture against Fascism was formed out of the Conference of World Writers in Paris in 1935. Mulk Raj Anand represented India in the conference and soon after the Progressive Writer's Association (PWA) of India was formed by Anand and S. Sajjad Zaheer who called the association's first meeting later in the same year. The PWA encouraged a revival of India's cultural past, stressed the social and political responsibility of the author and urged "to take culture to the 'masses', and finally, to develop regional languages and literatures" (Dalmia 160). While the PWA of India was the most important formative influence on the IPTA, the IPTA as a specific activist movement in people's theatre had other international forerunners including the LTGs (Little Theatre groups) in Britain, the Federal Theatre Project in USA and the Moscow Art Theatre in Russia. The first conference of the IPTA was held on May 25, 1943 in Bombay.

Organizationally, there was a central squad in Bombay and eight provincial squads of the IPTA that reported back to the central squad. These provincial squads were set up in Bengal, Bihar, the United Provinces, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Malabar and Karnataka. In July 1944 a Central Cultural Squad was formed to cater to developing experiments with

folk tunes and take these experiments back to the masses. Soon after, there evolved three divisions of the IPTA—songs and dance, drama and film. By 1953, further organizational decentralization had become imminent and an All-India executive committee was formed with a President, not more than five Vice-Presidents, a General Secretary, four Joint Secretaries representing the four zones and a treasurer.² The aim was to bring greater coordination between the various provincial squads and the central squad and continue the political and aesthetic concerns of an Indian cultural awakening. By that time however, a vast and diverse repertoire has already emerged that staged Indian people's long history of subjugation and subordination with huge mass following that spread across India with a revolutionary zeal. Almost every major and minor artist joined hands with the IPTA:

With the Central Cultural Troupe based in Bombay and regional units in Bengal, Assam, Malabar, Andhra Pradesh, the United Provinces, Punjab, and Delhi, the IPTA produced the first repertoire of important new plays meant for noncommercial mass audiences and achieved national success with several of them. During the “golden decade” of 1942–52, the organization attracted virtually every serious Indian practitioner of theatre, film, dance, and music, including Bijon Bhattacharya, Shombhu Mitra, Utpal Dutt, Balraj Sahni, Dina Gandhi (Pathak), Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Prithviraj Kapoor, Habib Tanvir, Sheila Bhatia, Ravi Shankar, and Sachin Shankar (Dharwadker 26).

In her account, Zohra Segal mentions a detailed list of artists including the likes of Prithviraj Kapoor, Balraj Sahni, Ismat Chughtai and others who were part of the IPTA in Bombay alone during the 40s (31-32)

There was an obvious surge of creative activity in various forms, but most prominently in the theatre. The best representative of the sensation that the IPTA had created amongst masses irrespective of regional boundaries, its nationalist zeal, its political and aesthetic concerns, was *Nabanna* (1944). Directed by Shambhu Mitra, Bijon Bhattacharya's *Nabanna* was a play about the Bengal famine, but more importantly it boldly portrayed that the famine was man-made, thereby moving beyond a descriptive account of a people's suffering to a recognition of the politicization involved in that. Nandi Bhatia notes that *Nabanna* was “more than a play about famine. It [was] also an attempt to expose the sordid reality that the famine was not a natural disaster but a man-made calamity” (‘Acts’ 82). *Nabanna* was thus strongly anti-imperialist in its message and grew immensely popular across the country. On the other hand, *Nabanna* was shockingly realistic in terms of its acute depiction of peasant life. As Moinak Biswas comments,

The famine also brought home the fact that the world is linked into a fateful unity by the forces of modernity even as it exploded the ahistorical allusions that urban educated classes would nurture about Indian villages...Bijan Bhattacharya's *Nabanna* brought upon the Indian stage completely new protagonists in the form of starving Bengal peasants (qtd in Bhattacharya 181-2).

However, the way *Nabanna* emerged as the first major anti-imperialist play that evoked powerful nationalist feeling and the way it came to be seen as the first ‘national’ success of the IPTA need closer examination. I would not go into the details of the theme and content of the text of *Nabanna* because evidently, a play about the plights of people caused by a devastating famine that claimed a lot of lives will be overly anti-imperialist. Beyond that, however, a major share of *Nabanna*’s postcoloniality lies in vision for the stage, in its theatricality. In the production of *Nabanna*, Shambhu Mitra had used a rather bare stage with limited stage props in the new naturalistic vein that sought to replace and counter the artificiality of the erstwhile urban theatre. Vasudha Dalmia notes,

The bare stage, the lack of props, the simple costumes, the act of the performers in slipping uninhibitedly from their roles on stage into that of social activists who invited the audience to participate in contemporary politics, made for ‘naturalistic’ theatre of a different variety (162).

Nabanna was a deliberate rejection of the tradition of the ‘well-made’ play with a new episodic structure:

Nabanna’s challenge to imperialism also occurs in the play’s violation of the conventions of ‘high realism presented in the ‘well-made’ play that dominated the metropolitan theatre in India in the early decades of the twentieth century. This disruption occurs through the episodic structure of the play, which prevents the action from being resolved at the end, frustrating interpretive closure....By converting the stage into a platform on which spectators are shown various aspects of the famine through sharply contrasting images of opulence and poverty, presented,...an episodic structure [that] violates the rules of realism (Bhatia ‘Acts’ 83).

Coupled with the rather stark stage-setting, Shambhu Mitra had used a revolving stage for the production of *Nabanna*, a ploy that further stressed the episodic nature of the play. This was supplemented by quickly shifting scenes that deliberately interfered in smooth chronology of the narrative. Malini Bhattacharya notes:

The abrupt ending of the scene breaks up the single track movement of narrative, and transfers the audience with great flexibility from one aspect of social life to another, from the woes of the peasants in their village homes to the hoarder’s den, from relief kitchen to charitable dispensary...so that, although the main focus is on Pradhan and his family, the approach to their problems is a multi-lateral one... (9).

This kind of new naturalistic theatre had a tremendous impact on its audience. Most scholars have acknowledged the sensation among spectators that the staging of *Nabanna* created. In

the context of Bengal, Rustom Bharucha locates in the wonder of the audience the revelation of witnessing the new replacing the old:

Enacted with fierce commitment and a burning sense of injustice by young members of the Bengal IPTA (including six communist party organizers with no theatrical experience) the first performances were revelations for Bengali theatre audiences, who had reconciled themselves to the sensationalism and melodrama of the professional theatre. They discovered for the first time in *Nabanna* the extraordinary impact of realism in the dialects and the street cries of the actors, the minutiae of their gestures, movements, and responses, and the stark simplicity of the set and the costumes (qtd in Dalmia 166).

Dalmia also quotes Bhisam Sahani's account of the performance of *Nabanna* in Rawalpindi that had deeply appealed the audience. The audience were equally spellbound by the play's form and touched by the acute suffering of their fellow peasants. This is where the organizational and aesthetic success of the IPTA precisely lay. On the one hand the narrative of suffering of a Bengali family in the wake of a devastating famine in Bengal generated emotional responses from people from all over India, releasing thereby a pent up nationalist zeal that in turn connected diverse regional pockets of India, while on the other hand formalist experimentations in the theatre challenged constructions of the colonial ethic. This had been IPTA's dual contribution to the nationalist cause. I have briefly focused on *Nabanna*, but there had been many other play-texts that came up fast and continued the impact created by *Nabanna*. These include Khwaja Ahmed Abbas's *Zubeida* (1944), Prithwiraj Kapoor's *Deewar* (1945) and *Pathan* (1947), Tooppil Bhasi's Malayalam *You Made Me a Communist* (1952), Ritwik Ghatak's Bengali *Dalil* (1952) and many more such plays. Many of these plays by IPTA like Bijon Bhattacharya's *Agun* (1943) generated strong nationalist statements and organized the common people against the colonial rulers. The IPTA's surge in the freedom struggle was later further enhanced when dance drama troupes and song troupes worked in parallel to theatre groups.

In her monumental work on Indian theatre, Aparna Dharwadker refers to Partha Chatterjee's theorization of the three moments that led on to India's independence in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* adding that the crucial Gandhian moment of manoeuvre has its parallel in the founding of the IPTA. She notes,

In the cultural sphere, the founding of the IPTA in 1943 represented a similar moment of maneuver, aligned not with Gandhian political principles but with the ideology of cultural movements on the Left that were accommodated systematically to Indian contexts for the first time (Dharwadker 29).

While we can certainly read into the formation of IPTA a distinct 'moment of manoeuvre', I would argue that in its activist-nationalist fervour, this is the first time that the nation is being

‘imagined’ through theatre. Despite its brief span, the IPTA is able to achieve a pan-Indian cultural awakening that ideologically connects the diverse and separate ends of the nation. This is also where we could read into the IPTA’s movement a pattern similar to the Nehruvian vision of India. If for Partha Chatterjee, the Gandhian moment of manouvre is succeeded by the Nehruvian moment of arrival then the IPTA’s organizational manouvre also anticipates the ‘arrival’ of post-independence modern Indian theatre. It is interesting therefore, to examine the IPTA vis-à-vis Nehru. The IPTA, with its strongly leftist base in politics and beliefs was traditionally opposed to Nehru’s version of economic development, industrialization, democracy and socialism as key poles of nation building. This opposition grew in 1948 when the Communist party underwent ideological transformation with P.C. Joshi, a ‘soft-liner’ being replaced by the more radical B.T Randive. The Congress government slammed a ban on the CPI for its radical line which was revoked only in 1951. The CPI blamed Nehru heavily, and as Balraj Sahni writes, “The Ranadive line of the communist party now laid down that Jawaharlal Nehru had become a stooge of the Anglo-American imperialists” (8). Soon after, Balraj Sahni came up with the immensely popular *Jadoo ki Kursi* (1948) for IPTA that, in the playwright’s apologetic words, “devastatingly lampooned Jawaharlal Nehru and his policies” (Sahni 9). This was also a time when Nehru’s ‘arrival’ was being balanced by the gradual decline of the IPTA, when it was already past its prime. However, I suggest that these seemingly irreconcilable poles have yet important patterns of connection within them that becomes visible once moral judgments are put aside. If Nehru was concerned about the revival of cultural nationalism, the IPTA did precisely that by focusing on the several folk performance forms of India. While Nehru was deeply hurt by the partition, the IPTA too responded to the crisis with plays like Khwaja Ahmed Abbas’s *Main Kaun hoon?* (1947) raising questions about identity in a world where boundaries have suddenly sprung up where there was none. However, the strongest link between the Nehruvian idea of national identity and the IPTA’s nationalism lie in the spirit of the quest of such an identity, to which I referred to at the beginning of this paper. The IPTA’s search for a theatrical language had been coupled with a quest to make sense of the notion of national identity, whereas that had been Nehru’s aim too, in different ways. Again, neither Nehru nor the IPTA were very sure about their respective quests, yet they never stopped searching. In his account of the idea of India, Khilnani, besides emphasizing Nehru’s role in etching the state in Indian imagination, repeatedly uses a rhetoric of indeterminacy and lack of clarity in Nehru’s ventures. On the other hand despite the tight and de-centered organizational structure of the IPTA, Sudhi Pradhan comments that “the organisation of the cultural movements was never very elaborately or thoughtfully planned. P.C Joshi, then General Secretary of the CPI took a personal interest in the organisation of culture” (qtd in Bhattacharya 183). If it is indeterminacy and lack of specificity that connects the respective quests, then it only enhances the quest itself. This spirit of the search would continue, when in the first drama seminar organized by Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1956, Indian theatre of the future would be sought. The ‘Akademi’, a Nehruvian institution of independent India, gave the responsibility of the search to national theatre practitioners across the country, many of whom had IPTA lineages.

Coming back to the IPTA before independence, the activist fervor of the IPTA thus allows a cultural awakening at a national scale. The ‘imagining’ of the nation, as it were, was being

staged by the IPTA in a way that had never happened before. More importantly, despite its organizational decentralization, this imagining of the nation through the work of the IPTA became possible because of a crucial ploy of ‘touring’. Given all its ideological positions about finding an indigenous theatre and resisting the colonial dramatic structures, the movement would have failed had these brilliant plays produced by several provincial units remained within their geographical and linguistic limits. That, fortunately, did not happen and for the first time there was an exchange of actual performative circumstances on a truly national scale—in a nation that was about to emerge. Touring squads were central to the organization of the IPTA from the very beginning, as Malini Bhattacharya points out:

A tradition that had already been in the making in 1942 and was later taken up by the IPTA was that of touring squads and touring cultural workers....In 1942, a student squad from Calcutta visited the easternmost districts of Bengal; another visited Assam in 1944. The purpose of both squads was to boost the morale of the people in areas which had come under Japanese threat; the second squad was also engaged in raising money for famine-stricken Bengal. While the first squad went to interior areas in eastern Bengal, the second squad visited mainly the district towns in Assam (qtd in Bhatia ‘Modern’ 162).

There were many such instances of touring in the several IPTA squads. These tours were often limited to local surroundings and often were even beyond state borders. In her account, Malini Bhattacharya gives special emphasis to the cultural awakening through songs, dance and theatre in the north-east India even before IPTA squads were formally formed. She notes:

Around the same time, in the Surma valley in Assam, talented singers from Sylhet like Nirmalendu Choudhuri, Gopal Nandi, Prasun Roy, and Khaled Choudhury were going around in the district towns and villages singing songs about the anti-fascist war, about anti-colonialism, and about the Bengal famine (qtd in Bhatia ‘Modern’ 164).

With the IPTA, these touring squads were organized and controlled, leading to the formation of a national identity across geographically dispersed India. In her account Zohra Segal draws attention to the centrality of the touring squads and the nationalist goal of such tours: “The Cultural Squad was a troupe of dancers and musicians, housed in very reduced circumstances in suburban Andheri, who toured all over India with a marvellous ballet called *Discovery of India*, based on Jawaharlal Nehru's book of the same name” (33).

To this would be added ballets like *Spirit of India* (1944) and *India Immortal* (1945), titles that are self-explanatory. *Spirit of India* was “more a patriotic pageant than a mere ballet” and “It showed the misery of the people under the ‘triple curse’ of imperialism, feudalism and the new imperial capitalism and ended on a note of hope arising from the people’s unity” (Bhattacharya in Bhatia ‘Modern’ 176). These patriotic pieces not only added a new layer of

realism to theatre but also urged “the notion of a pan-Indian cultural heritage, into which flowed the various regional forms, forming an unproblematic whole” (Dalmia 162).

The other feature of the culture of touring was a simultaneous rise in a culture of exchange. Not only was the touring squad of IPTA responsible for a cultural and nationalist awakening in the region where they were touring, they were equally influenced by the local songs and performance forms, which were often included in the performance of the touring squads. If the IPTA touring squads were ‘national’ bodies in the sense that they represented a central cultural organization and had a distinctive ‘national/cultural’ agenda, then through touring, they came into increased contact with indigenous performance forms at the local level. These indigenous performances would enter into a curious interaction with the performances that the IPTA squads had brought with them. One example would be the Manipuri renderings of Hemanga Biswas’s Bengali songs by Irawat Singh that became quite popular in Manipur.³ Through these touring squads thus, IPTA sought on the one hand a continuous restructuring of its own performative dimensions and on the other generated tracts of bonding among a diverse people of India so that national identity could be ‘imagined’ into existence even as the new nation was coming into being. Again, while a major share of the debates about national identity in the post independence decades of the 1960s and 70s lay in the extent of interaction and distinction between the national and the regional, as we have seen, the IPTA was already working a national identity within these conflicts, between the binaries of the national and the regional well before these debates would begin to take the centrestage. IPTA’s decision to reach out to the people through the crucial culture of touring instead of performing within the confines of specific geographical spaces, thus remain a very important step in generating nationalist feelings among the people of India and in forging a unified national identity.

Once the IPTA disintegrated, partly because its direct association with the Communist party created ideological differences among many of its members and partly because India had achieved independence from the colonial rule, so there was no immediate nationalist cause left, there was a divergence, ideological and aesthetic. In many ways, the strictures of the IPTA had become too stifling and breaking free from it provided greater freedom in theatrical expression. In its later years, it was increasingly felt that the IPTA had overruled formal experimentations in favour of propaganda, in way it had not done during the *Nabanna* phase. For Malini Bhattacharya,

These two polarities of opinion in fact supplement each other and arise from the same theoretical preconception that politicization and formal experimentation in art are opposed to each other. The development of this preconception within IPTA was one of the manifestations of the theoretical crisis it came to face (qtd in Bhatia ‘Modern’ 173).

The disintegration of the IPTA, however, never remained a deterrent for theatre activity in India. Indeed, the years following the disintegration of the IPTA saw greater experimentation and a greater search for newer modes of expression through the theatre. Post-IPTA, the decades of the 1960s and 1970s saw immense theatrical activity in all parts of India. These

were distinct and experimental in each of their efforts yet many of these were continuing the ideas and ideologies of the IPTA in critically distinct ways. The activist quality of the IPTA was perhaps best exemplified in its lineage that was carried over by street theatre movements in India, chiefly in the theatre of Safdar Hashmi, but remains beyond the scope of this paper.

Notes:

1. In her book *Poetics, Plays and Performances: The Politics of Modern Indian Theatre*, Vasudha Dalmia refers to the draft resolution of the first IPTA conference. See Dalmia, 2006, 160.
2. See 'Organizational Principles: Indian People's Theatre Association' in Nandi Bhatia, 2009. 457-461.
3. Malini Bhattacharya (in Bhatia 2009) refers to many other interactions and exchanges between several regional song and dance traditions.

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