



Rethinking Interaction On and Off the Stage.

Rethinking Interaction on and offstage: Jana Sanskriti's experience

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Introduction

While addressing the question of using theatre of the oppressed with youth, I find myself questioning the category of youth. As I hope to make clear in the next section on Jana Sanskriti's place of work, the idea of youth does not translate easily in our context. This is not to say that there is no specificity with regard to age, but that the idea of being youth problematically slips into the notion of having youth. Observing the experiences of people in rural India, it is hard to identify youth as having an experience that is somehow distinguished as experiences of the youth. In other words, the continuity they bear to more general experiences stands out.

In this essay, I will first focus on the context of our work where I elaborate on the lack of nutrition, health, and education for young children in India and what I see as the most basic stages of growth that are denied to the youngest members of our society. Then, I discuss how these oppressions are reproduced in the political culture of West Bengal, which further denies the possibility of intellectual development among rural citizens. I then describe Jana Sanskriti's methodology of theatre of the oppressed to highlight its specificities and variations from the theatre of the oppressed canon. In this section I show our focus on providing a space for collective and reflective action. I present a couple of examples from plays on patriarchal domination to highlight the nature of interaction and spect-actor formation which foregrounds the distinguishing characteristic of Jana Sanskriti's work. Finally, I argue that our specificity rests on a particular theoretical or philosophical conception of interaction which has emerged from Jana Sanskriti's practice.

Context

The holistic development of any population can be measured first and foremost by the health, nutrition, and education of its children and women. The significance this has received in modern societies is inversely related to the degree to which this has faced neglect in India. This deprivation has resulted in malnutrition among our children that is worse than children in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to the National Family Health Survey, in 2005-2006, the percentage of children who suffered from malnutrition is 46%. The ratio of child mortality is 57 per 1000 people. Among women between the age of 15 and 49

years, the percentage of those with anaemia is 63%. It is also clear that a similar survey conducted in 1998-99 shows little progress in terms of family health terms in these past seven years.

Does the deprivation and health situation of youth and women, solely affect them? In reality, this affects the entire population and this has long-term consequences. Adequate health, nutrition, and education for children play a role in determining adult health, capacity to work, and intellect. In the same way, the health and nutrition of women determines the health and future of their children. Research has demonstrated that those societies which have high Human Development Indices have higher average heights, weights, and health. In Japan, where people were stereotyped for being short, their average height has now exceeded the U.S. It isn't that this is unknown to policy-makers in our country.

In 2002, Pratichi Trust brought out its report on the state of primary education in West Bengal that clearly pointed out towards a nearly collapsed condition of the primary school system. The entire primary education scenario of West Bengal was marked with several deficiencies and implementation failures. A different sort of privatisation in the form of private tuition almost replaced the public primary education. Children learnt so little in the schools that they could not even write their names without having the external support bought from the private tutors. The pre-primary facilities, crucially important for making the primary schooling effective, were almost absent. While the lacklustre delivery of primary education in the state had its roots in the paucities of the school education department (that dealt with the children above 5 years of age), what came along, in addition with it, was the extremely poor delivery of services which was called the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), meant for the children under 6 years of age.

Taking holistic child development into account, in 1975, the central government instituted the largest program for the Indian child called Integrated Child Development Services. In which a major component was pre-school education (PSE). The coverage of this major and centrally important programme for the children below six years of age was very poor; in addition the functioning of the existing centres were awful. It is regrettable that the way in which children have faced indifference and neglect from their cradle onwards, this program too has faced similar neglect. Despite 33 years of this program, not more than 50% children are covered by this program. As a result of various social movements the Indian Supreme Court directed that ICDS become universalized on 28 November, 2001. Despite this, the intervention has hardly expanded its range. Moreover, there are numerous problems in its implementation. On the one hand, the food supplied for nutrition is of terrible quality. On the other hand, the other important aspects such as pre-primary education are hardly even implemented.

In other words, the context in which we have to work with youth is very complex. Is there a "childhood" for those children who suffer from malnutrition and grow up as malnourished youth? Their childhood is lost in the murky waters of reality. You can see children of 4-5 years of age working with their fathers. And girls of similar age are working with their mothers. These are the children who grow to be the youth spectators of our performances. Jana Sanskriti, Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed works mainly in villages. In some cities, we also work among slum-dwellers. It is questionable whether India is progressing. First, who is progressing? Which class? Is the meaning of progress, the ability to consume more? There is no room to elaborate on these questions in this article. However, it must be said that in a

country that has been independent for sixty years, where the question of universalizing pre-primary and primary education has been recently raised, and where the index of Human Development relies on people's capacity to sign their names, in such a place, it is true that tiny steps of progress may seem like massive occasions for celebration. Actually, development is relative.

In other words, the youth we work with in villages and towns, they neither had a childhood, nor an adolescence. They didn't have nutrition nor quality education. Even now a number of children drop out of middle school because of the poor foundations established in primary education. Even in the case of our actors they were mostly drop-outs as well as engaged in child labour. They have worked as domestic workers to menial jobs in small shops. As they grow up a little bit, they start working in the unorganized sector. Even now those who work as daily labourers need to migrate to the city in search of work. Along with this is caste discrimination, although caste has been politicized in a way that the external manifestations of caste are not as aggressive as they are outside of West Bengal. The reform movements in the 19th century in Bengal and the mid-20th century land struggles and trade union movements had relied on class unity to affect caste hierarchy in some un-doubtable ways. However, caste discrimination still exists in pernicious forms.

Now market fundamentalism has become an added factor. Everyone wants to participate in the market even though the market excludes. As a result, people's wants are increasing. To satisfy these wants people are working harder and searching for more work. People are searching for more work as a result of increasing aspirations and wants. Earlier the search for work was aimed at meeting subsistence needs, and now it satisfies wants. This difference is apparent in a number of places, although it is not true everywhere. In Indian villages, a lot of people do not eat well for even one meal a day. Wherever middle-class aspirations have increased, individualism has increased too. Civil society is weakening. As a result, the collective initiatives that used to be taken up by civil society no longer seem possible today. People are increasingly dependent on NGOs and parties who sometimes bring the government closer to people. In this kind of context, when we work with youth in these villages, we can hardly see their situation as somehow distinguished as a 'youth' issue. After all, here the youth can see the origins of all kinds of exploitation and oppression in political and economic social relations. The content of our theatre becomes political where youth, aged, men and women, everyone searches for the relations of oppression. With this they are enthused to debate and think about oppression and exploitation and to look for a path towards transformation. I turn now to the description of our methodology.

Methodology adopted in Jana Sanskriti:

Forum theatre is our main arsenal. But for us Forum theatre is a production of a play as well as the process of creating a play. It is also the process of a total transformation. Process is as important as the product here. We do not determine the aspect of oppression to be addressed in a play beforehand. Actors in the workshop identify various forms of oppression and then choose one among them to focus on in the play. Play-making is part of our political methodology. Here, we script plays before we play the script. While scripting the play, actors find their reality in a critical way. Actors not only engage in social critique, they embody social critique as they study characters to be scripted and played as social constructions rather than as individuals. For example, the process of scripting a play requires them to

analyse the ideology of oppressors, beliefs that oppressed characters have in mind, the practices and rationalizations through which these ideologies are apparent in behavioural norms and so on. The whole play-making exercise becomes an intellectual journey for the actors which we view as empowering. Together, actors explore the social root of the problems and characters in the story. These stories are always based on facts and not fictions, on a multiplicity of perspectives on characters, rather than a singular interpretation of their characteristics.

In the next stage of this methodology, the play is taken to the audience to invite engagement between actors and spectators. A dialogue between actors and “spect-actors” takes place during a performance. They discuss, debate and become argumentative. In this debate, actors, and spectators engage themselves in the intellectual journey I was talking about. This is how the actors and spectators travel together from particular to general, from experience to theory and this is the intellectual journey. This intellectual journey is at once an affective journey which I characterize as internal transformation. The internal transformation develops desire within people to go towards creating social transformation offstage. Performance is not enough. Acting takes place in real life in the form of social action. The meaning of acting becomes apparent in its dual sense. When actors and spectators act onstage they are actors and spect-actors and while they act outside the stage to bring change in their reality they become activists. Our method here brings acting and activism, acting onstage and offstage, into relation and confrontation with each other.

The scripted play is taken to the same group of spectators for at least three times at an interval of a month. When actors perform a forum theatre play in front of spect-actors we call that collective action. In forum theatre, the spect-actors and actors debate and discuss the oppression depicted in the play. Often, the oppression remains unresolved, revealed in its complexity and multiple challenges and dilemmas. The collective witnessing of such complex oppression leaves spect-actors reflecting on how to resolve, complete, or reconcile the problem depicted in the forum play. They start reflecting during and after the forum performance. Every such collective witnessing and action leads to reflective action. So we create a space for an ongoing engagement in collective and reflective action. Actors and spect-actors travel that path in order to rationalise the situation depicted in the play.

The forum play is performed in a particular region for at least six months to a year. In other words, audience members see the same play at least three times. At this time, a large group of audience members and actors continue to discuss the issue at hand. This discussion relies on the collective witnessing, debate, reflective action that comes out of forum theatre. At a particular point in this process, the discussants begin to contemplate how they might translate the solutions debated onstage in their offstage lives. Bringing the audience members together is the initiative and mobilizing agenda of the local theatre teams.

So forum theatre is a process that starts from the workshop and continues as performance and then goes beyond performance. After rationalising spectators, feel like acting towards changing their immediate reality. In this way, theatre continues as offstage politics, and the offstage politics then informs the next cycle of play-making. It never ends.

In the last two decades we have addressed a wide range of issues. For example, corruption in the public distribution system which affects nutrition and health in households, liquor production which drains household income from schooling towards liquor consumption, corruption in the local government, the existing relationship between party and people, superstitions, caste discrimination, lack of quality in rural primary education, and forms of violence experienced in particular by women. In fact, patriarchy in the home and in public institutions is a common thread of Jana Sanskriti's work across regional contexts within India. In most cases we have succeeded reasonably in addressing these issues. And I would argue that part of our success has been a result of refusing to see a youth issue as simply a youth issue, or a women's issue simply as a domestic issue, or a party issue simply as an adult issue.

In our work theatre is always theatre for change. Change can come through a rational participation of the spectators - the people. This constitutes an alternative for people. After all, the dominant political culture expects blind following which is not something that sits particularly well with people. Theatre creates debate among people and that is its primary contribution to the formation of collective political action. In addition to the form of oppression being discussed in the play, we also distribute information to the public in the form of pamphlets and meetings. This is also part of the democratizing process.

Membership and Examples: The Outcomes of Our Method

Jana Sanskriti membership is striking. The ratio of men and women in Jana Sanskriti theatre teams is almost 50:50. Similarly, its spectators are equally divided among men and women. Further, our actors range from the age of 16 to early 30's.

In this section, I will bring out some examples from plays that centre on the experience of patriarchy. Through this I hope to communicate with readers a common experience of power relations everywhere.

The first example comes from our theatre unit in New Delhi. We work there through an organisation called Delhi Sramik Sanghathan (Delhi Worker' Organisation). They are active with workers in unorganised sector. The team we have developed there are all youth ranging 16 to 23 years of age. Most of them work as domestic workers and some of them work in various unorganised sector like construction work, vegetable seller etc.

The play they were performing was called Stop! Don't go! It was about a young woman married at an early age. This young woman wants to act in a play staged by a social activist group, but her young husband of 24 years is not willing to see that his wife acting in public. To him women should not engage in theatre. He was a patriarch in the play. The actor Kailash plays a very tricky husband in the play. He can justify his actions very well. Jaya plays his wife, one who is not ready to be the victim of patriarchal oppression. She is trying to resist his control, but not succeeding. This is very important in any forum play. We try not to portray total victims without hope in our plays. Rather we portray an oppressed person engaged in combating the oppressor but not succeeding for various external and internal reasons. Let's talk about the play.

Husband: you can't go to perform in a play that takes place on the street.

Wife: Why? What's wrong in doing that?

Husband: My friends laugh at me, you should obey me. Don't go.

Wife: This is not an ordinary theatre, it is a kind of social work. I feel dignified while acting in the play.

Husband: Get lost! Don't talk big, after all you are a domestic worker, dignity is not something you can ask for.

This is how the dialogue proceeds in the play. We called spect-actors to come on stage. They were coming one by one and the forum was advancing. Suddenly a young girl shouted STOP! I want to come. The joker was a bit conscious. I knew that girl as I saw her acting as spect-actor previously in our play. She is a very intelligent young woman, works as a house maid in a middle class house hold. Her name was Anju. Anju came and replaced the protagonist in the play. Interaction between oppressive husband and oppressed wife started again.

Husband: You can't go to act in theatre.

Anju (the spect-actor): I love to do that, so I will.

Husband: My friends are laughing at me and telling me that I am not a strong husband.

Anju: What makes a strong husband?

Husband: Don't argue.

Anju: My friends are also laughing at me.

Husband: Why?

Anju: You play cards on the street and they think you are gambling without letting me know.

Husband: You think men will have to let their wives know about what they are doing with their friends? We men can play cards. That is acceptable in society. But, women acting in street theatre is not acceptable.

The interaction between the oppressor character and the spect-actor was reflecting a patriarchal society. The character of the husband was looking at his wife's will from the perspective of society. It was hardly a problem between two individuals. The genesis of the problem to them lies in the society.

The joker was about to stop the interaction. Anju pre-empted the conclusion of the intervention and said to the joker- "Let me say something before you stop us." In this way she prolonged a debate that the joker might have concluded prematurely. The intervention continued.

Anju: Do you watch Bollywood movies?

Husband: Yes, very much. You can also see some with my kind permission.

Anju: Don't you see women dancing with men, sometimes very scantily clad women?

Husband: (With laugh) Yes, so what?

Anju: Are they not women in public? Are they not wives or sisters of some one? If you don't see any problem in watching women dancing with men as in the movie, why do you see me acting in the play as objectionable? In fact, the play I want to act in raises social consciousness among citizens.

Now the husband character was silent. He had no response. Spectators started clapping and the actors too.

After the play was over I found Kailash the oppressor character in our play standing quietly in the corner of the temporarily made green room. I put my hands on his shoulder asked how did you feel about the intervention of Anju? He said, "Sanjoyda the intervention made me stand in front of myself and I realise that I had a patriarch in me even though I act in the play that addresses patriarchy." I was amazed. This is how a collective action leads to an introspective action.

I would like to offer one more example which comes from rural West Bengal. This is from a play called Sonar Meye. For the past eighteen years Jana Sanskriti's twenty five theatre teams have performed this play a few thousand times in rural areas. In this play a young girl who is not yet eighteen is being forced to get married. In this play a girl's experience of life before, during, and after marriage is depicted. I will illuminate a particular scene from Sonar Meye. In the play, the family of the girl is very poor. There is also a young son in the family in addition to the protagonist daughter. In one of the scenes in the play, we see that the girl is about to be inspected by a prospective groom and father in law. This practice of the groom's family inspecting the girl is a common practice. This inspection supports two sets of related norms. First, the family wants to inspect the girl to see if she meets expectations. Here she is reduced to a commodity. The groom and his family study the girl's body and person – from skin complexion to any disabilities she might have – to ensure that they know what they are getting. If they like her then the second step of negotiating dowry begins. In modern times, the demand for dowry has increased as a result of consumerism and commercialism. Dowry is an integral part of marriage even though it is an agonizing institution. The girl's father is among the most oppressed with this institution even though he perpetuates the problem of getting his daughter married early and for a price. On the one hand, he has to get his daughter married and cannot let her choose her own companion. On the other hand, the socially-sanctioned requirement that he give dowry for her marriage throws him into severe debt. No doubt the troubles of individuals are apparent in social relations. Individuals and society are related in this way.

In the next scene, we can see that a young girl sits on a chair. We can see a young man and an elderly gentleman inspecting the young girl. They are likely the prospective groom and father in law. The parents of the girl are extremely tense as they are anxious that the inspectors like their daughter. As the girl is inspected, the prospective groom measures her hair by his arm's length, he looks at her eyes closely, and asks her to walk to ensure that her mobility is normal. In this scene, not only is this woman oppressed, the idea that she can desire dignity is not even recognized. In the course of this scene we invite interventions to see how people respond to the norms depicted in this play and how the girl can

be liberated from the inhuman disregard for this woman. In the place of the woman, spect-actors intervene with various forms of action. Acting as the protagonist woman, a number of spect-actors resist the measure of their hair, refuse to walk, insist on pursuing their education, and refuse to get married. Moreover, almost all the spect-actors destroy the dowry system in their interventions. When the spect-actor as the woman protagonist says that she wants to study and not get married, the father in the play says that he cannot educate his son and daughter because he does not have the financial means to support both. The audience is pushed to consider this norm as well. Why is the daughter not entitled to a right to education? Why is the father's financial means dedicated to the son? In other words, this forum play is holistic because along with the daily oppressions of patriarchal norms it addresses various forms of discrimination and exclusion in society.

One day there was a performance of Sonar Meye in a village. Forum theatre engagement began on the scene described above. A number of men and women began to show a number of solutions to the particular experience of the woman. On one occasion a woman stepped onstage to act as spect-actor. The spect-actor has visible markers of her poverty. In her lap she holds a malnourished child and a veil over her head. She comes onstage to replace the girl onstage. In the play, when the prospective groom wants to inspect the girl's hair, the spect-actor resists.

Female spect-actor: You cannot measure my hair in this way. But my question is it is not my concern what you as an individual are doing. In fact, as an individual, I too can resist your actions. But the question is, why should social norms be such as to give men the authority to inspect women in this way. If women similarly inspected men before marriage, would it be any good?

As the woman uttered these words, the women in the audience clapped to register their applause. For this woman, the problem depicted in the play is not the problem of some individuals and families. Rather in this play about one family she saw the problem of a patriarchal society. This is interaction when a person is led to articulate not just an event, but the social forces producing an event. They can see the origins of a local problem in the broader forces of society. In this way, the audience grow together intellectually. In the world of intellectual thought they begin to feel a sense of comfort and confidence. This is an aesthetic experience. This makes life meaningful. This is what I am calling an internal revolution. One which breaks human passivity and makes them transformative agents of the external social world. They crave transformation of the external world. Theatre of the oppressed becomes a rehearsal of total transformation.

My Conception of Theatre of the Oppressed

Based on the examples described above, in closing I will highlight what I view to the kernel of Jana Sanskriti's conception of theatre of the oppressed. I often think that theatre is a tool for constructing relations. It works as a connecting thread. Sometimes between the actors and the audience, sometimes among actors, and sometimes among the audience. And sometimes, it enables the actors and the audience members to connect their internal lives with their external worlds. The most important thing in theatre of the oppressed is this construction of relationships. That is why, while the performance is on, the centre of the gravity onstage cannot be perceived as somehow limited to the stage. It moves

amidst and among the spectators. Just as this universe is subject to centrifugal and centripetal forces, in that way, in Augusto Boal's theatre as well the relationship between actors and audience members is characterised by these forces. The actors and audience have come together on the basis of these two forces. As a result of this connection in unity progress becomes possible. Collective action is constructed as a result of actors and audience coming together. And then, thought constructs the ways ahead, ways for change. This is progress. Actually unity and collectivity is the cause of progress. And the opposite is also sometimes true.

Besides what is aesthetics anyway? Aesthetics is also a collective expression, a mixture, a sign of unity. When we look at a forest we see a collection of trees, but also a collective characteristic in the relation among the trees. If in this forest we did not experience the trees in their relationship with each other, then we would hardly have a conception of a forest. The genesis of aesthetics and even truth is the relationship between one and another.

The audience of theatre of the oppressed, particularly in Forum Theatre, the audience member steps onstage and shows how they want to depict the characteristic of the oppressed. This makes people think that the structure of the play is being destroyed. Besides, the audience is not used to seeing the magic of acting. Typically, they see characters as action figures rather than acting. In this form of collective act, the actors act and the spect-actors engage in action. But the meeting of the two result in the formation of beauty. It is true that this beauty is much more a matter of affective realization. The beauty of the play is not its external colours and structure, but the relationships that emerge through Forum Theatre.

Whether it is conducted with youth or any other designated group, what's important is the way in which we understand theatre of the oppressed. The weakness in understanding theatre of the oppressed adequately has caused much of the crisis characterizing the practice of theatre of the oppressed in much of the world today. This is not just a bunch of theatre techniques. It is a method and concept for politics. In that politics, multiple dimensions and ways of thinking come together. Each person observes this method in different ways. Nobody will identify a special philosophy or philosopher among them. After all, a number of ways of thinking and contexts of practice have come together. To forget this is to give theatre of the oppressed a dogmatic character. This is a troubling trend because it will turn theatre of the oppressed into doctrine and take it away from philosophy. At any rate, let me get back to how I see theatre of the oppressed.

Theatre or any other art is a means of constructing relations. But it is very important to understand how these relations are constructed. Often the relation between actors and audience members is based on hierarchy. But the actor is not always aware of this hierarchy. In some kinds of theatre this is obvious, because in them, the actor is a star. In theatre of the oppressed, star culture is anathema. Still, on the question of constructing relations with the spectators there are a number of issues that come up. The joker is often tense. This is because the joker is busy measuring success by the number of spect-actors who come up onstage to intervene. This is not the appropriate form of this work. First, whether spect-actors come to the stage or not, how and why they come onstage depends on how the actors and jokers look upon the audience members, with what attitude. This determines how the spect-actors

come onstage and in what numbers. Second, more than a question of how many people intervened it is far more important to think about what exactly we mean by interaction in forum theatre. Actors will assume that in front of them are various intellectuals in the audience who are each keen to think and reflect. They want a democratic space where they can articulate their thoughts. The moment the actors and the jokers realize this they will be able to construct a relationship. The hierarchy between actors and audience members will break. At this stage, dialogue is hardly a technique, it is a practice with which both are comfortable. Collective thinking and intellectual contemplation has been a foundational sphere of human society. When hands became free the human could see an endless horizon and much more information than was previously available. The question 'why' was born as humans had to explain the endless horizon on the basis of the information available thus far. Already the differences and contradictions between the information in their heads and the vast sources of information around them create the conditions for asking why. Overcoming this conflict leads to the formation of human society. There was no centralization at the time, no institutions, and hence no institutional head. People's collective thinking has led to various forms of progress. The conflict I was talking about is in one sense art. An art of existence. And at the same time, the conflict is a source of intellectual debate expanding people's engagement in the world of intellectual thought. In other words, art and intellectual debate is constitutive and habitual to humans. And yet, modern life has removed most people from the world of intellectual debate and art. And in their place an elite class has established control over intellectual debate and art.

Artistic creation is born from society. It is not surprising then that art is social metaphor. Artistic debate makes people social critics. When I began work among agricultural workers in villages I noticed two important features in people's art form. First, in rural folk culture, the relationship between art and audience is extremely democratic. This is because they understood that any form of collective learning democracy has to play a significant role. Second, I have witnessed the use of classical tales in rural folk culture and never found characters that lack complexity. The characters are present onstage replete with the qualities and flaws. As a result, it is hardly possible to fully empathize with them. Alienation is the norm. The artists wanted the audience to be alienated from the characters and examine them. Brecht may have been born in India before Germany – one would not be mistaken in thinking this. That's why in the recent past, the rural artists in villages have taken a pioneer role in critically reflecting on social relations and events. Perhaps this is why the colonial governments and independent Indian government has made little effort to keep these folk arts alive. Indeed, in some cases they have actively worked to destroy and repress them. Like these folk forms of art, theatre of the oppressed too believes in democracy between actor and spectators and the importance of democracy for collective learning. Besides, the making of spectators into spectators was a thoughtful plan to democratise political action. Let me quote from Boal- *'In all human beings, all sensations arouse emotion. Equally, the human being is a rational creature, it knows things, it is capable of thinking, of understanding, and of making mistakes.'*

Democracy is the principle element in artistic and intellectual life. Indeed, in social life itself. Moreover, making an ideological commitment to a world where artistic and intellectual learning is part of the comfort zone for every person brings revolutionary change in the practice of art and theatre.

For this reason, theatre of the oppressed is for us a rehearsal for change. In particular, Forum theatre the formation of a relationship between actors and audience members is constructed in the journey from 'I' to 'We' and from 'We' to 'Them'. This is extremely important. In order to elaborate on this, it is imperative for me to resort to a story. In Boal's theatre, fact is primary. But I am taking recourse in fiction. Many years ago, in Turkey, there was a scholar called Mullah Naseeruddin. Naseeruddin was a great story-teller. One day a layperson asked Naseeruddin a question, "Respected Mullah what is my relationship to you?" In response, Naseeruddin told him a story. One day I decided that I would go and see my murshid. In the Sufi tradition, the intellectual guide and priest is known as murshid. After walking for three days I reached the guide's home. When the murshid heard the knock on the door, he asked "Who calls?" In response I said, "It's me Naseeruddin, sir." When the door did not open, I knocked again. Again, without opening the door, the murshid asked, "Who is it out there?" I said, "It's me. Me, Naseeruddin." Again the door did not open. Disappointed without an option, I walked on without any direction. I had a deep anguish in my heart. At one time I felt that this pain allowed me to reflect on myself. I was a spectator of myself. Who am I? I asked myself. A number of hours went by as I contemplated this question. In the end, I would return to the murshid's home. I went and as I reached I knocked on the door. From inside, the murshid asked, "who are you out there?" This time I said, "You." Amazingly, the door opened. I saw the murshid standing in front of me. The story demonstrates with great clarity the fact that the journey from 'I' to 'You', from 'We' to 'Them,' lies at the heart of interaction. In this there is the experience of oneness. This is the philosophy being the politics of relation and politics of spirituality. Spirituality is oneness. It has got nothing to do with institutional religion.

In forum theatre there is a journey from audience to actors, that is from actors to spect-actors. We are all spect-actors. The audience here are actors and the actors are audience members. Everyone here is a spectator of society and themselves. Let me reiterate these fundamental principles: that spectators are basically intellectual, that democratic relationship between actors and spectators is the principle element in theatre, and that the journey from 'I' to 'We', from 'We' to 'Them' is imperative. Is it enough for us to consider these fundamental principles simply as theoretical positions? Probably not. In any such position, there must be two dimensions. Theory and logical emotion. Catharsis is an expression of a negative emotion whereas positive emotion does lead the person to be rational. I am talking about that emotion that lives in our heart and generates complementary feeling for the theory that lives in our brain.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have described the context in which we work where the distinction between working with youth and working with adults does not emerge as a defining characteristic of the issues at hand. Yet the characters, actors, and spect-actors often reflect on the structural exclusions and domination young girls face in the process of being pushed towards early marriages. Moreover, the neglect of school as an institution for poorer citizens in general, and for girls in particular is commonly discussed onstage as a problem tied equally to state neglect and patriarchal norms.

In this context, theatre of the oppressed provides some tools with which to publicly and collectively reflect critically on the social forces and individual consent through which domination and

discrimination rules people's lives. Forum theatre provides an opportunity to not only recognize the individual problem as a social one. Rather, it also highlights, practices, and publicizes an alternative mode of social interaction itself. That is, it reveals the possibility of a form of democratic and reflective interaction among human beings in ways that accord dignity and respect in action. This is not accomplished overnight. But through long-term engagement, repeated performances of the same plays in the same places, and ongoing offstage political action which reinforces the commitment to the possibility of interacting beyond the scripts of patriarchal norms, histories of hierarchy, and state exclusion.