



MARXISM IN UTPAL DUTTA'S DRAMA

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ABSTRACT

Utpal Dutt, a prominent figure in Indian theatre, is renowned for his plays' use of Marxist concepts. His plays, which address social justice, anti-colonial resistance, and class struggle, are a clear manifestation of his Marxist views. Through powerful tales and significant historical occurrences like the Royal Indian Navy Mutiny in Kallol (1965) and the 1857 insurrection in Mahabidroha (1989), Dutt utilised theatre as a platform to denounce capitalism, imperialism, and social injustice. His books include key ideas of Marxist theory, emphasising the need of collective action and the exploitation of the working class. By challenging existing social structures, Dutt's plays' political action and avant-garde theatrical approaches sparked conversations about revolution and transformation. This study explores the ways in which Marxism manifested itself in Utpal Dutt's plays and how his Marxist beliefs influenced his creative vision and how they have persisted in Indian political theatre.

Keywords: Marxist, Utpal Dutta , Drama,

INTRODUCTION

Theatre activist, writer-playwright, director, and actor Utpal Dutt believed that the power of the stage could bring about positive social change. He gained fame for penning sociopolitical plays with a didactic purpose, with the goal of educating the politically ignorant masses of Indian culture about Marxist principles. By eschewing the conventional and traditional forms of Indian theatre, he caused a revolution. He worked tirelessly to revolutionize Indian theatre, particularly Bengali theatre, and became one of the most famous and important playwrights of all time. The unyielding thespian's plays demonstrated his remarkable experimentation with various dramatic techniques, theatrical devices, and genres while simultaneously voicing his intransigent protest against the authoritarian government, and his contributions to modern Bengali theatre were substantial.

Literary critics agree that Utpal Dutt was an early voice in the radical political theatre that emerged in post-independence India. "Theatre must preach revolution; it must not expose the system but also call for the violent smashing of the state machine", was his firm belief. According to Dutt, the role of theatre is twofold: first, to bring attention to the widespread hypocrisy, racism, exploitation, and antiquated customs in our society; and second, to inspire change. He began writing radical anti establish plays based on real or mostly real occurrences in an effort to realize this utopian ideal. Utpal Dutt's The Great Rebellion is a well-known protest drama that traces the events that transpired in 1857 that paved the way for a coordinated uprising against the British East India Company's control.

While still a student in England just before the First World War broke out, Dutt formed his first ties to the Socialist Movement. After planning a socialist conference in October 1917, he was kicked out of Oxford University. In 1919, he became an official member of the British Labor Movement by taking a job with the

left-wing statistics agency known as the Labor Research Department. He helped create the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in 1920 with Harry Pollitt. Not only did he visit India in 1921, but he also started and maintained a monthly journal called Labor Monthly till his death. Dutt was appointed editor of the Workers' Weekly, the party journal, in 1922. From 1923 to 1965, Dutt served as the primary theoretician for the CPGB and was a member of the party's executive committee. In 1923, on his first trip to the Soviet Union, Dutt participated in ECCI (Executive Committee of the Communist International) discussions pertinent to the British movement. When the ECCI Praesidium needed an alternative in 1924, he was chosen.

After becoming sick in 1925 and having to resign as editor of Workers' Weekly, Dutt spent a number of years travelling across Belgium and Sweden as a Comintern delegate. For a while, he oversaw the Communist Party of India, which was a significant job for the Comintern. The Soviet Union and Stalin's stance had Palme Dutt's undivided loyalty. While CPGB General Secretary Harry Pollitt was in favour of Britain's entry into WWII in 1939, Palme Dutt sided with Joseph Stalin and had Pollitt temporarily retire. Consequently, he was named party general secretary and remained in that position until 1941, when the party's stance on the war shifted due to the German invasion of the Soviet Union, prompting Pollitt to be reappointment.

In his book *Fascism and Social Revolution*, he examines the growth of fascism in several nations, including Germany, Italy, and others, and offers a harsh critique and analysis of the ideology. His definition of fascism was a historical movement that never had a coherent ideology and instead relied on "a ragbag of borrowings from every source to cover the realities and practice of modern monopolist capitalism in the period of crisis and of extreme class-war" as its guiding principal. By looking at the international economic crises of 1914 and 1929 as origins of fascism, Dutt vehemently criticizes taking fascist "theory" and ideology at its value. Dutt argues that the capitalist crisis rendered capitalism rationally untenable, and that fascism's irrationality was a calculated strategy to rally the masses behind a movement that pretended to be "anticapitalist" while in reality it sought to undermine the working class revolution and ensnare workers in the capitalist state. When all previous means of gaining working-class support for capitalism have failed, the capitalists resort to fascism, liberal democracy, or social-democracy, according to Dutt's theory, since it is merely another type of bourgeois rule. "Dutt also focuses heavily on post-war social-democracy in his book, which he accuses of betraying the workers' revolution and aiding fascism's rise through internal disorganization of the working class and the prevention of militant action: "Fascism operates primarily by coercion alongside of deception; Social Democracy operates primarily by deception, alongside of coercion.").

Dutt said that Stalin's "sun" naturally had some "spots" after his death, and his response to Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech after Stalin's death downplayed the speech's importance. His opposition to the party's more Euro communist stance in the 1970s and his disagreement with its critiques of the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia demonstrate his hard-line position inside the party. He was a lifelong member of the party who stepped down from his roles in 1974. According to historian Geoff Andrews, "included Rajani Palme Dutt" was among those who continued to get around £15,000 year "for pensions" from the Soviet Communist Party even into the 1970s. Located in Manchester's People's History Museum, Palme Dutt's papers cover the years 1908–1971, and are part of the Labour History Archive and Study Centre.

Dutt and Artaud: The Influence of Marxist Thought

According to Marx, in a society that is dominated by capitalism, individuals cease caring about one another and instead begin to concentrate only on their personal goods. In order to break the spell of indifference that affects spectators, theatre artists, as stated by Utpal Dutt (1929–1993), who integrated Marx's theory into his work, need to find a way to break the spell. The *Verfremdungseffekt*, which was developed by Bertolt Brecht, is perhaps the most well-known theatrical tactic that effectively appeals to the lack of interest of bourgeois audiences. Ernst Bloch asserts that Brecht used the term "estrangement" in order to combat the same sensation of being alienated among the audience. Therefore, in order for humans to maintain their sense of sight and hearing, they need to be startled awake.

For the purpose of startling his audience, Brecht used a variety of shocking strategies. His use of German phrases, for instance, was purposeful because he intended them to startle the listener rather than flow easily into one another. He wanted them to flow into one another. The unpredictable ebb and flow of discourse keeps the audience on the edge of their seats, which stops them from growing comfortable and allowing their emotions to cloud their judgment while they are watching the action develop onstage with the audience. When it comes to breaking through the audience's sense of alienation, several writers have attempted to do so in similar ways, but with different techniques.

As a result of the lack of interest shown by his audience, Dutt saw the need of overcoming the obstacle that had been set. This was very necessary for him to do in order to secure the audience's agreement with his ideas. Based on his reasoning, he concluded that this was the type of circumstance in which portrayals of violence onstage may be beneficial. He suggests in his book "In Search of Theatre" that innovative portrayals of violence may be the answer to the audience's lack of interest in the performance. The bourgeois, with their arrogant way of thinking, are of the opinion that the power structures of society are unchanging. As a consequence of this, no one is likely to dispute his dominating position in the social power dynamics. In his mind, theatre characters are static "types" that conform to his prejudiced beliefs of the order of society. He would want to make this distinction.

Marxist theatre is a kind of theatre that actively challenges such prejudiced ideas of the nature of social relations. As per Dutt's perspective, the "propriety" of bourgeois theatre is completely eradicated by the presence of violence. When we consider the idea that man may be demonstrated to be cruel, our morals are jolted and we are shocked. Post-Holocaust contemporary theatre is not concerned with protecting us from the reality; rather, it tries to aid us in facing it. It is possible for dramatists to show cruelty as a technique of shocking their audiences and compelling them to get more involved in social issues in a society that causes people to feel intellectually weary and bored in being nothing more than money-mining robots.

Antonin Artaud (1896–1948), a prominent torchbearer of the French avant-garde during the interwar period, was perhaps the most important proponent of the methodical use of "violence" in theatre. In his manifestos for the Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud expresses his belief that the only way to revive our modern-day impulses and drives is to combat them. He believes that this is the only way out. According to Artaud, the objective of theatre is to provide the audience with an experience that causes them to suspend their disbelief and get completely immersed in the performance:

According to Artaud, the ideal theatre is one that converts words into spells by rejecting the patterns of speech that are common in Western culture. The voice is boosted in volume. The usage of vocal inflections

and features is included into it. Underfoot, it tramples beats with a frenzied abandon. There are sounds that accumulate over time. Astonishment, numbness, charm, and sensuality arrest are some of the aims that it seeks to achieve.

The use of terms such as "trample," "pile-drive," and "benumb" by Artaud reveals his goal to "assault" the senses and suggests that the director is attempting to aggressively provoke an emotional response from the audience while they are watching the film. It would be difficult for the theatre to exist, in Artaud's opinion, if there was not some degree of cruelty that was inherent in each individual presentation. In the present state of degeneration that we are in, metaphysics has to make its way back into our awareness via the skin... In addition, massive societal shifts, racial tensions, natural disasters, random events, and the allure of death will all manifest themselves in a variety of different ways. These includes the mythical forms that characters take on as gods, heroes, or monsters, as well as the tangible objects that emerge from cutting-edge scientific research.

Even though Artaud did not openly say that Marxist philosophy had a substantial effect on his theatrical work, we are nonetheless able to see a number of important connections between the two. Despite the fact that the unlettered proletariat would not be able to comprehend the nuances of written language, they could nevertheless be able to have the theatrical experience in Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. This is because Artaud rejected literary drama, which is heavily based on the words of the writer. From a similar perspective, Dutt saw the huge potential for public influence that existed inside the theatre. Even if the exploited masses are unable to read or write, they are nevertheless able to listen to the words of a play. This is because the majority of them are denied access to greater educational opportunities. The savage "assault" that Artaud launched on the dulled senses of his audience was an attempt to shock them out of their complacency and bring them face to face with reality.

The recent catastrophes that have been caused by humans, such as nuclear accidents and wars, have shown that our civilization has reached a "state of degeneration" in which empathy is no longer an acceptable trait. The pain of our fellow humans is something that we are strangely oblivious to unless we are driven to pay attention by something that is external to us. According to one interpretation, Artaud's "assault" on the senses might be seen as an effort to elicit moral reflection by the use of such a force. In accordance with Marx's theory that people in capitalist societies are uninterested in rational or creative pursuits other than the acquisition of material goods, Dutt also came to the realization that in order for his political theatre to achieve the effect he intended, he needed to force his audience to step outside of their comfort zones (Dutt, "In Search of Theatre"). Artaud's purpose was to infiltrate the individual's consciousness, but Dutt's concentration was on the class. Both Dutt and Artaud employed violence as a technique to attain their goals, despite the fact that their topics were distinct. For an example of how Dutt delicately presents violence onstage, have a look at some of the pieces he has created.

Depiction of Class Struggle and Worker Exploitation

The Marxist theory has a significant impact on the plays of Utpal Dutt, which are characterized by the presence of key themes such as class warfare and worker exploitation. As a driving cause behind oppression and resistance, economic disparities were a driving force. Dutt often presented these disparities as ingrained social imbalances between the working class and the affluent. *Kallol* (1965) is a fantastic illustration of

how his characters reflect the downtrodden working class and their fight against the tyranny of colonial and ruling class oppression. Within the context of this movie, the rebellion of Indian sailors is symbolic of a larger battle against the systemic exploitation of people. In these stories, Dutt emphasized the inevitability of conflict between those who oppress and those who are oppressed, echoing Karl Marx's view of class struggle as the engine of historical change.

Dutt considers capitalist institutions that maintain inequality to be systems that exploit workers. This is not something that is exclusive to colonial situations; rather, it is something that is often seen. The denial of workers' fair pay and dignity was a recurrent issue in his plays, which depicted the exploitation of labor. His plays were written in the early 20th century. In his portrayal of revolutionary heroes, Dutt presented individuals who, by working together, face and finally overthrow these oppressive regimes. Marxists are of the opinion that in order to achieve social justice and bring about the destruction of capitalism, the proletariat must rise up against the bourgeoisie. As a result, the conclusion of his plays often includes calls for revolution and collaboration among the working class. By seeing theatre through this lens, Dutt was able to educate his audience about political concerns and urge them to fight the society systems that are based on exploitation.

Dutt's Use of Historical Events as Marxist Allegories

The early exposure that Utpal Dutt had to Marx, Engels, Lenin, and other political figures strengthened his conviction that there was a need for a public revolt against the oppression and exploitation of the capitalist society. Because of this idea, his Marxist worldview became more firmly established. His plays were always written with the intention of revealing the true nature of the characters and illustrating the potential that people have to bring about psychological, social, and cultural shifts in society. Dutt, on the other hand, was a figure that caused division, even among the members of his own group. There is a widespread perception that his plays unjustly target certain socioeconomic strata as a result of his purported manipulation of historical events. Numerous accusations have been made against him, including that he is anti-communist, anti-patriotic, a China merchant, and a great deal more. The theatre that Utpal Dutt has created has been the subject of a variety of critiques and different points of view. Dutt first expressed his support for the Naxalite Movement, despite the fact that he later grew to regret his decision. On January 3, 1968, he was controversially freed from jail, but nobody knows what occurred since no one knows what happened. Therefore, if we take into account all of the praise and criticism, we can consider Utpal Dutt to be similar to Janus, the Greek deity who is said to have two heads.

Despite the fact that Dutt was significantly engaged in the production of commercial films, the ideals that inspired his plays, which he authored and produced in Bombay and Kolkata, are not shared by commercial films. In light of this, we are left wondering if he was so ignorant as to enjoy the fruits of capitalism while at the same time attempting to destroy it, or whether there was a gap between his theory and his conduct. The major focus of my research will be on the political allegories that have been circulating around Utpal Dutt, including the man, his plays, and his theatrical practice. While this is going on, I will do all in my power to investigate the controversies that surround Dutt's political theatre, specifically discussing the ways in which he politicised theatrical aesthetics and changed Bengali theatre. As part of his revolutionary strategy to attack long-held concepts and practices of state authority, Utpal Dutt used theatre as an activist to challenge these ideals and practices. Finding out how far he went and how well he did is something that interests me.

When seeking to get a more profound comprehension of Utpal Dutt's work, it is essential to take into consideration his ideological position, the framework he had in mind, and the kind of theatre he was aiming to produce. The nonfiction writings of Dutt, such as *On Theatre* and *Towards a Revolutionary Theatre*, as well as other essays and interviews, may provide a general summary of the theatrical techniques that Dutt employs. During the time when Bengali political theatre was being developed, Dutt was the pioneer. An article written by Dutt titled "What is to be Done?" can be found in the collection titled "On theatre." In this essay, Dutt outlines the ideal form and methods for political theatre. The idea of art was Marxist for someone like Dutt, who was vocally Marxist in their beliefs. He intends to talk about the function of political theatre in our country, including its functions and the methods used by those in positions of power to weaken it and divert it from the goal for which it was created. There will be no discussion with those individuals who consider theatre to be an autonomous and "pure" art form. It is more accurate to say that they are similar to the wealthy adolescents from industrialized countries who resort to drugs in order to satisfy their boredom. Considering that forty percent of the population still goes hungry on a daily basis, I just do not see how we can afford to make such expenditures in India.

According to Dutt, political theatre has the ability to educate men and bring their attention to the intellectual tyranny that they have been subjected to for a considerable amount of time throughout their lives. The bourgeoisie in India promotes certain cultural practices as unquestionable "eternal Indian values" with the expectation that the general public would eventually come to embrace them as such. This not only offers a reason for the tyranny and exploitation of the common people, but it also gives support for the class interests of the bourgeoisie. To illustrate his point, he uses the Congress party as an example and explains how they pushed for nonviolence as a value that was drawn from ancient Indian literature. The objective was to convince people to embrace nonviolence while simultaneously ignoring the brutality and torture that the state was doing in other areas. According to his point of view, ideology is a weapon that the ruling class use in order to exert influence over the ideas of the general public. Because of this, they would want it to be the case that the world only sees India through the prism of Gandhi's nonviolent political efforts, completely disregarding the country's long history of fighting for its independence via violent means. In an effort to draw attention to the exploitation of the bourgeoisie, Dutt sought to conduct an in-depth investigation of such views and explain to the general public his conviction that the truth is true.

Throughout his career, Utpal Dutt, who was a deep-seated Marxist, actively searched for and campaigned for a kind of theatre that had a political purpose. Just like Piscator, Dutt was a supporter of Erwin and believed in the concept of political theatre. "In all my publications, I have always made it unmistakably clear that a theatre for which I am responsible must be revolutionary (within the limits that its commercial situation prescribes) or nothing at all," Piscator said in his article entitled *The Political theatre*. There is no "art" or "business" carried out at the theatres that I am in charge of (320). He makes the assertion in his own theatrical thesis entitled "What is to be Done" that the phenomenon of "political theatre rediscovers the true historical facts and proves that violence has been the midwife of all social change in the past, will continue to be so in the future." The purpose of political theatre is to bring back the revolutionary traditions that the people have been used to.

When the play *Kallol* (also known as "The Wave") by Utpal Dutt was performed on March 28, 1965, there were genuine waves of criticism experienced in both Delhi and Bengal. A recreation of the historic Naval Mutiny that occurred in 1946 is shown in the production, which also demonstrates how the British and the

Congress party played an important role in putting down the revolt. The Congress Party's abandonment of the revolution's goal was proved by this. As stated by Utpal Dutt, Kallol depicted the duplicity of the Congress Party while simultaneously highlighting the heroic stories of the Navy and the workers inside the organisation. The major theme of the play was that the pacifism of the Congress was an imperialist strategy, and that the only way out was via an armed revolution. Both the degree of accuracy with which the play Kallol portrays the Naval Mutiny of 1946 and the degree of significance that should be given to the historical facts that are conveyed in the play were topics of significant disagreement.

An additional event that took place during the first performance of the play was that all of the main newspapers of the time period, with the exception of The Statesman, prohibited ads for the performance. Despite this, neither Dutt nor his colleagues were successful in putting a stop to the performance of the play or restricting the attendance of its audience. They dispersed leaflets across the whole of Kolkata in order to raise awareness about the play's presentation. The play was performed in a number of different locales under a variety of names. Following his arrest, Dutt was found guilty and sentenced to seven months in jail. On May 7, 1966, a huge number of artists, intellectuals, and ordinary residents participated in a march in support of the play Kallol and to call for Dutt's release from jail.

Another incident that illustrates the influence that the drama had at the time is the Bengali debut of Utpal Dutt's play The Nightmare City, which took place on May 16, 1974 in Kalamandir and was presented by People's Little Theatre. The Nightmare City is a play that graphically depicts the tyranny of the government in the hands of many individuals, including the police, moneylenders, companies, and politicians. In addition to the terrible assaults that were committed on the cast and crew, there were many schemes in the works to prevent the play from being performed. The performance of Duswapner Nagari (also known as "Nightmare City") by the PLT was scheduled to take place at the Star Theatre on August 26, 1974; however, thugs attacked the members of the PLT despite the presence of fully armed police officers. They were unable to put on the concert on that particular day. This event resulted in a significant rebellion among those who went to the theatre, people who thought about it, and members of the media.

The police have accused Utpal Dutt and PLT with committing a crime against the state for allegedly creating and producing Duswapner Nagari in violation of the Indian Penal Code, Special Provision 124(A). The following are the allegations: Throughout the course of the play, the capitalist class is singled out. The criminals are the target of the second act of the play. Third, the play shows an attack against the party that is now in power. It is quite evident that the purpose of this application of section 124(A) of the Indian Penal Code to a theatrical group was to put a halt to the performance of theatre. In many cases, his concerns revolve on the ruling class and the manner in which it subverts the opinions of the general public in order to preserve its own power and autonomy. The way that Dutt is attempting to organize the people in order to fight against the ruling class and their tyranny, both mentally and physically, is accomplished via this method.

Legacy and Influence on Indian Political Theatre

Utpal Dutt's revolutionary use of theatre to communicate Marxist values had a significant influence on political theatre, and he was responsible for a significant transformation in the face of post-independence drama in India. Dutt was a pioneer in the development of a new kind of theatre that mixed pleasure with a political message. He challenged the constraints of conventional storytelling in order to directly address

important social and political issues. His works, which had profound historical and political relevance, inspired a new generation of authors and performers to utilize theatre as a tool for social change. Some of these individuals went on to become actors and writers. The merging of Marxist theory with modern Indian political issues, such as anti-colonialism, class conflict, and the fight against oppression, has had a significant influence on political theatre in India. This has been the case because of Dutt's work.

Dutt was a pioneer in the area of political theatre, and his 1947 play "Little Theatre Group" was a significant move in this direction. This is in addition to the issues that he addressed in his plays. Through their efforts, they were able to establish themselves as a foundation for progressive and radical theatre at the same time as they helped bring greater political consciousness to Indian audiences. His works inspired following political dramatists to confront themes like misogyny, economic exploitation, and casteism on the basis of their own experiences. By blurring the barriers between art and activism, Dutt made it possible for Indian political theatre to become a powerful vehicle for social change. This insured that his legacy would continue to be an essential component of India's cultural and political discourse for a long time to come.

CONCLUSION

The play by Utpal Dutt is a powerful critique of economic, social, and political inequities through the lens of Marxism, with a particular focus on the working class and those who are oppressed. Through his plays, Dutt used theatre as a means to promote class consciousness, collective action, and resistance to exploitation. He did this by deftly combining revolutionary concepts with real-life occurrences. For example, he shows class strife, worker exploitation, and the battle against colonialism and capitalism with a Marxist zeal. He also represents the resistance against capitalism. Not only did Dutt's work in Indian political theatre embody his ideological ideas, but it also had a lasting impact on the art form, inspiring following generations to continue the practice of using theatre to affect social and political change. Dutt's work was a significant contributor to the development of the art form.

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