

# ***Guriya-Ghar: Tripti Mitra's Take on Sambhu Mitra's Putul Khela***

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## **Abstract**

The paper discusses Tripti Mitra's *Guriya-Ghar* (1981), a Hindi adaptation of Sambhu Mitra's *Putul Khela* (1958), an acclaimed Bengali re-creation of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879). The Hindi adaptation premiered in Kolkata featured the celebrated actress-director Usha Ganguli as Munya (Nora) who also adapted it into Hindi. The paper employs theatre historiography as its analytical tool to reconstruct the performance and its reception. It argues that the selection of performance testifies to the strong authority, prestige or powerful "cultural capital" connected to *Putul Khela*. It will show how the Hindi production was not simply copied into a new context. Instead, it will demonstrate that the production became a powerful contemporary statement for the simple reason that the director, actors and spectators re-created the performance with their own time and agenda in the back of their minds.

**Keywords:** *A Doll's House*, *Guriya-Ghar*, *Putul Khela*, reception, theatre historiography, Tripti Mitra

## **Introduction**

An interesting aspect of the history of *Putul Khela* (1958), an adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* by one of the doyens of modern Indian theatre, Sambhu Mitra, is its longevity as performance. Mitra staged it for the leading Kolkata-based theatre group Bohurupee<sup>1</sup> for over a period of two decades in which he performed Tapan (Helmer) and his wife, the iconic Tripti Mitra played Bulu (Nora). It was re-created several times. Tripti Mitra directed its Hindi adaptation *Guriya-Ghar* (1981) produced by Rangakarmee<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Generally regarded as the leading theatre group of post-independence India, Bohurupee was formed in 1948 in Kolkata with a band of committed theatre personalities who were associated with the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). It provided Sambhu Mitra with the platform where he could experiment with forms, techniques and contents. The three-decade (1948-78) involvement with Bohurupee proved to be a period of rich productivity in Mitra's career. He translated and adapted western classics including *King Oedipus*, *A Doll's House* and *An Enemy of the People*, rediscovered Rabindranath Tagore with his path-breaking productions of *Raktakarabi* (*Red Oleanders*), *Visarjan* (*Sacrifice*) and *Raja* (*King of the Dark Chamber*) for the proscenium theatre in addition to acting with great aplomb. During Bohurupee's early phase he revived the play on Bengal famine, *Nabanna* (*New Harvest*) written by Bijan Bhattacharya which he had co-directed with its author in 1944 for the IPTA. Bohurupee which produced some landmark plays in the past is virtually inactive on Kolkata stage these days.

<sup>2</sup>Rangakarmee is a well-known theatre group which was founded in 1976 in Kolkata by its artistic director and renowned actress Usha Ganguli to produce mainly Hindi plays. It runs a repertory

in Kolkata; the daughter of the celebrity pair Saoli Mitra, herself a renowned actress and director, revived her father's for Pancham Vaidic in 2002 in the West Bengal capital. *Putul Khela*'s popularity transcended time and place as Kanthasheelan programmed the play as its maiden production under Khaled Khan's direction in the Bangladesh capital, Dhaka in 1993.

In this paper, I wish to discuss Tripti Mitra's *Guriya-Ghar* which featured the celebrated actress-director Usha Ganguli as Munya (Nora) who also adapted it into Hindi. To reconstruct the performance and study its reception, I will employ theatre historiography, featuring my own interview with Ganguli and read the paratextual materials, such as the playbill and reviews. I argue that the selection of performance testifies to the strong authority, prestige or powerful "cultural capital"<sup>3</sup> connected to *Putul Khela*. I will show how the Hindi production was not simply copied into a new context. Instead, I will show that the production became a powerful contemporary statement for the simple reason that the director, actors and spectators re-created the performance with their own time and agendas in the back of their minds.

### Background

With a cast and crew more or less familiar with Mitra's *Putul Khela*, Rangakarmee's *Guriya-Ghar* in 1981 was in some way provided a room for a meeting and negotiation between the two. To put it into perspective, the production was designed and directed by none other than Tripti Mitra, the celebrated Bulu in the Bohurupee production; Khaled Chaudhury who had done the *Putul Khela* set was invited to do the same for *Guriya-Ghar*; and Tapas Sen, the light designer for the Bohurupee making, illuminated the Rangakarmee performance. Besides, Usha Ganguli, who had seen a Bohurupee performance, based her Hindi translation on the Mitra script. In addition, most of the performers and crew had either seen Mitra's production or heard about it. As the present narrative will reveal, the spectators who saw Tripti Mitra's directorial work for Rangakarmee generally had been to the Bohurupee event. Add to it the setting. It was the same site, once again Kolkata, where, on January 10, 1958 Mitra premiered his stage classic. The Rangakarmee production which came within three years of Bohurupee's curtain-drawing show in 1978 thus created a room for a meeting and negotiation between the two.

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theatre and has produced a number of full-length Hindi and Bengali plays in addition to producing one-act and street plays with notable success.

<sup>3</sup>"Cultural capital is the accumulation of knowledge, behaviors, and skills that a person can tap into to demonstrate one's cultural competence and social status. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu coined the term in his 1973 paper, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," co-authored by Jean-Claude Passeron. [...] In his 1986 essay, "The Forms of Capital," Bourdieu broke down the concept of cultural capital into three parts ["embodied state", "objectified state" and "institutionalized state"]. [...] Bourdieu observed that cultural capital is used to facilitate and enforce social divisions, hierarchies, and ultimately, inequality." (Cole 2019)

### The Playbill

That the Hindi production of *Putul Khela* was an attempt to intervene in the Mitra classic is stressed in the playbill<sup>4</sup> disclaimer. It states that *Guriya-Ghar* is a Hindi adaptation of *A Doll's House* “following the total pattern of **Sambhu Mitra's ‘Putul Khela’** (sic) by Smt. Usha Ganguli”. It also introduces its director Tripti Mitra, “the celebrated personality of Indian Theatre movement”, the light designer Tapas Sen “whose name also needs no introduction” and the set designer Khaled Chaudhury “who is regarded as the doyen of set designing in Indian Theatre movement” (NS: *GH* 34/15). That the renowned trio joined hands to re-create Mitra's *Putul Khela*, albeit in Hindi, indicates that both physically and emotionally they entered a stage which had been haunted by Mitra's presence. To intervene in the already haunted territory was a challenge for the trio. And, it was perhaps doubly challenging for Tripti Mitra as director to facilitate a performance which featured her own remarkable acting. How did she design the play? And how did the set and light designers collaborate with her? I will return to the director-designers-performers' collaboration issue later.

One hears an echo of Bohurupee's ghost in the Rangakarmee playbill as it reasons for its selection of *Guriya-Ghar*. It draws on the words and phrases one comes across in the Bohurupee playbill<sup>5</sup> to announce that Rangakarmee's choice of the production was not prompted by any feminist agenda; that it was not thought to be “a play [to propagate] so-called women's lib. or [to condemn] male chauvinism”. It states that Rangakarmee chose the production, because it felt that it was “still relevant for societies throughout the world” (NS: *GH* 34/15), which reminds one of the Bohurupee playbill that emphasises *Putul Khela* as a human tragedy.

The second paragraph of the playbill states how staging *Guriya-Ghar* was a challenge for Rangakarmee:

When we started the rehearsals of ‘**Guriya-Ghar**’ many Theatre-lovers including some very serious Hindi Group Theatre Workers raised their eye-brows. Why the adaptation of that ‘**Nineteenth Century Classic**’ of Ibsen in 1980's India? A few even advised us that as one of the Calcutta's youngest theatre groups, we should not proceed with it. We avoided the debate and silently got down to the tasks of production. (NS: *GH* 34/15)

Having underlined the challenge as such, the playbill alerts one to “ten furious, angry processions” with the corpses of teen housewives:

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<sup>4</sup>The one-page computer-typed playbill which I collected from the Natya Shodh Sansthan, an archive in Kolkata, does not contain the date of its printing. The Sansthan's file on *Guriya-Ghar* (No 34) contains reports, feature-articles and reviews some of which I will consider for the present discussion. Some of the documents do not have dates as well as the names of the newspapers/periodicals in which they were published. In such cases, the in-text references are marked as NS: *GH* 34/document no in parentheses. The entries accompany the years when the publication dates are known. References in such instances are made as (NS: *GH* 34/document no, year).

<sup>5</sup> The copy of the playbill I have in my possession does not contain the date of its publication. However, renowned actor Debotosh Ghosh who replaced Amar Ganguly as Krogstad told me (Telephone interview 2011) that it was published either in 1968 or 1969 by him on behalf of Bohurupee.

When we were sweating ourselves in the rehearsal room, we were stunned in Calcutta by at least ten furious, angry processions with the corpses of teen housewife [sic]—some committing suicide by falling from roof-tops, some by burning themselves. The place of such happenings ranged from the areas inhabited by the rich to the lower middle class bustees [slums]. (NS: *GH* 34/15)

The reference to the furious, angry procession is far from casual. I take it as a pointer to the producer's choice to intervene in *Putul Khela*. The allusion as I read it contextualises the problem that *Guriya-Ghar* aimed to address; that despite its refusal to be labelled as a production propagating specifically women's cause, by its reference to the incidents it indeed moved in that direction. One may argue that this was precisely the case with the Mitra production as well, for *Putul Khela* in spite of its expressed claim that it was not designed to advance a feminist agenda, it precisely did so through the performance.

### The Title

Ganguli's choice of the title, *Guriya-Ghar* is a verbatim Hindi translation of Ibsen's *Et dukkehjem*<sup>6</sup> -and not of the popular, widely known English title *A Doll's House*- which registers the inherent irony contained in the Norwegian title that a doll cannot have a home of its own; that it can at best have a house which provides one with shelter only. Mitra intervened in Ibsen by calling his play *Putul Khela* (Playing with Dolls) because he wished to expose the puppetry of humankind. Ganguli's title is indicative of her own interest, an interest she shares with Ibsen that a doll-wife cannot have a home. Her choice reveals the nature of her intervention in the Mitra text that she used it not to unravel the puppetry of humankind but to tell the story of one unheralded wife, Muniya who discovers that all through her conjugal life she has been her husband's doll-wife; that she has never had a home of her own. Ganguli's title announces her intention that she selected the Mitra classic in Bengali for her Hindi adaptation to reinterpret it in her own time which has witnessed the tragic incidents of suicide of the teen-aged *gurias*, the doll-wives.

Ganguli's title is a take on the male-dominated society that characteristically reduces women to dolls and judges them from a patriarchal standpoint.<sup>7</sup> To call a woman *guriya/gudiya* is to deny her certain agency. She grows up as a doll and consequently accepts the doll-like existence as an inevitable part of her life. The performative nature of the action makes her a sacrificial goat at the patriarchal altar. A recent Hindi film, *Kahaani GudiyaKa* (Doll's Story 2008) directed by Prabhakar Shukla features its

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<sup>6</sup>Frode Helland argues that Ibsen's own title is an instance of oxymoron because in Norwegian it is common to speak of *dukkehus*, doll's house. Helland finds the replacement of *hus* by *hjem* quite important (Helland 136).

<sup>7</sup>In the notes to *A Doll's House* Ibsen writes, "A woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day, which is an exclusively masculine society, with laws framed by men and with a judicial system that judges feminine conduct from masculine point of view". And in his notes to *Ghosts* he writes, "These modern women, ill-used as daughters, as sisters, as wives, not educated according to their gifts, prevented from following their calling, deprived of their inheritance, embittered in temper—it is these who furnish the mothers of the new generation. What will be the result?" (Cole 151, 155)

protagonist named Gudiya who plays a doll. That the protagonist is named Gudiya points to its similarity to Rangakarmee's production. There are of course other areas of resemblance. However, based on a real life incident, the film depicts the perils of a woman in a phallocentric society which literally plays with her. She is powerless, she is voiceless. She does not decide the course of her own life; she is the one who is acted upon. Yet, she has to bear the cross all by herself. Ganguli's intervention in Mitra's script is accentuated through her re-titling of the play after Ibsen's which indicates that she is interested in understanding Mitra's human tragedy in more immediate terms, in terms of a woman.

### Intervention in the script

An adapter is an interventionist and Ganguli's intervention in Mitra gets revealed in her treatment of his script. Mitra had in his mind a Bengali audience for which he edited the Ibsen play so that it could appeal to his own time and society. Through his numerous cuts, omissions and additions Mitra aimed to create an essentially Bengali play out of Ibsen's. Mitra excised Nora's famous tarantella, and replaced it by a recitation of Tagore's poem because a dance by a married Bengali wife was incomprehensible during the 1950s. Mitra also gave Bengali names to his characters, and replaced Christmas with Durga Puja to emphasise the Bengali locale. Introduction of Durga Puja in the performance in addition to creating the Bengali locale can however be an oblique reference to the woman question that the play attempts to address. With exaggerated physical manifestation of the deity coupled with the folklore it is traditionally associated with, Goddess Durga can be a critique of the pigeonholing of women in Mitra's contemporary India.

Nevertheless, Ganguli had somewhat a different audience, if not quite a Hindi-speaking audience, in her mind<sup>8</sup> for which she brought certain changes and alterations as well as replacements to her source text. To begin with, her characters are given the names which are quite familiar in the Hindi-speaking society. Mitra's Bulu thus becomes Muniya, because Muniya is indeed a very common proper name for women in her targeted society. The other characters also have easily recognisable Hindi names:

Mitra	Ganguli
Tapan	Ajay
Krishna	Asha Shastri
Dr Roy	Dr Nigam
Kestopada	Kundan Mehra

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<sup>8</sup>Certain ambivalence marks the Kolkata Hindi spectatorship, for it is not exactly a Hindi-speaking audience. Asked by Atul Tewari, "what is your take on the Hindi Theatre?" Usha Ganguli responded, "I had designed most of my plays for a Hindi audience but 99% of the audience is Bengali whereas hardly 20% of the audience is Hindi speaking. So we have never had a language barrier. There is a little difference between theatre in Mumbai and Bengal. There we do not need to popularize anything. We are not forced to compete with films or TV serials. There is nothing such as a Saturday or a Sunday. The shows keep happening all the time". ("Meet the Playwright" 2006).

Hemanta	Dinu
Kuli	Porter
Ayee	Ayee
Rontu	Bunty
Rina	Binny

Ganguli adds a character, a Letter Bearer to her persona who is present neither in her source nor in Ibsen's. Ganguli told me that she introduced the character because she thought it to be "unnatural" for Kundan Mehra (Krogstad) to drop the letter and the bond in the postbox himself (Personal interview 2009).

Ganguli's intervention as adapter is once more revealed in her alteration of the occasion. In Ganguli, the occasion of Puja is replaced by Holi, which is also known as the festival of light and colours, and celebrated by the Hindus across India as well as Nepal and Pakistan. Ganguli's replacement of the setting thus opened up a space for a more inclusive festive occasion ensuring participation of a wide range of people. Besides, the essentially carnivalesque nature of Holi in a way enabled Ganguli's Muniya to dance the rather wayward dance which she introduced because "the recitation does not register that powerfully" (Personal interview 2009). One may also argue that Ganguli introduced the dance because she is a recognised dancer.<sup>9</sup> Be it what it may, the dance emphasised the play of sexuality somewhat toned down by Mitra when he opted for recitation. The dance in *Guriya-Ghar* thus retains Ibsen's ambivalence: Muniya is open to male gaze and at the same time she plays up to sexuality. As regards the meta-theatricality of the scene, the dance also enables Muniya as the dance of tarantella, according to Helland, empowers Nora in *A Doll's House* "to communicate with the spectators in the auditorium behind the backs, or over the heads, of her spectators on the stage" (21), i.e., Nigam and Pratap. But how did Muniya dance to communicate with the audiences? Ganguli told me:

Of course, I did not ask the choreographer, Asit Chatterjee to design a tarantella sequel for the production because the tarantella and its associations are not immediately recognised in our part of the world. In consultation with the director I asked him to create a hybrid sequel mixing the classical Indian dance forms with their contemporary variants. Muniya began with a classical mix; in her desperation she deliberately broke the norms of the classical dance and in the end resorted to contemporary dance to go wild. (Personal interview 2009)

Ganguli's account indicates that the dance was designed considering the gravity of the situation. Muniya's dance creates a bridge between her and her spectators in the auditorium who are made aware of her crisis by her *mudras*. In *Putul Khela*, Bulu recites to create a space of her own. She recites the Tagore poem in her own way without caring for Tapan's instructions with a view to marking her presence in the dominant discourse as well as hitting back at the domination à la the subaltern. Muniya's dance, the visual narrative, precisely does the same in *Guriya-Ghar*. She breaks the classical dance and re-

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<sup>9</sup>The director of Natya Shodh Sangsthan, herself a distinguished actress and director, Pratibha Agarwal told me that one of the chief reasons for the introduction of dance in the performance was Ganguli's recognition as a dancer (Personal interview 2009).

scripts it in her own way to indicate that she will no longer dance to her husband's choreographing; that from now onwards her dance will be hers only.

Rangakarmee's choice to replace Durga Puja by Holi and the recitation by the dance is significant. Durga Puja is a predominantly Bengali festival and it does not have much following outside West Bengal and Bangladesh. Besides, Puja retains the social, political and religious hierarchical order along the line of caste with the persons concerned discharging specific duties. On the other hand, Holi has a wider following in the Indian subcontinent. Importantly, it is more a festival than a religious occasion which accommodates people from all walks of life allowing them the possibility of breaking loose. Seen from this perspective the use of Holi in the production gives Muniya the space to speak for herself through her dance. Conversely, Holi sans disciplinary elements can also be a take on the structured, well-defined institution of Puja.

One can also find in Muniya's dance a couched dismantling of authority. Through the dance, Tagore, the dominant discourse, is literally done away with. The recitation of Tagore's poem is the most notable inclusion in Mitra's performance. Tagore is still the point of reference in Mitra. The dance in the Rangakarmee production has not grown out of Tagore's, a possibility recommended by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya who translated *A Doll's House* into Bengali as *Putuler Sangsar* in 1944. By its choice not to include the recitation as well as its ignoring of Tagore for a dance sequel, *Guriya-Ghar* announces the death of Tagore's authority.

### **Feminising *Putul Khela***

As mentioned above, for Khaled Chaudhuri, the set designer and Tapas Sen, the light designer and not to mention Tripti Mitra, doing *Guriya-Ghar* for Rangakarmee was an exercise to negotiate the Mitra ghost of which they were a part. Chaudhuri's set and Sen's lights as well as Tripti's acting have been hailed as the landmark achievements in Bengali theatre. Ganguli told me that Rangakarmee invited them to see how they confronted their own production in a changed milieu. She also said that they were given "absolute freedom" to design the performance (Personal interview 2009). To reinterpret a stage classic with which they were actively involved was thus indeed a challenge for them, because the Bohurupee production that ended in 1978 was still fresh in the memory of the spectators. How did they rise to the challenge?

To start with, Tripti Mitra as director conceived of the performance in feminist terms, a note emphasised by one of the reviewers (see below). That Tripti wanted to recreate the production from a woman's perspective is also underscored by Ganguli. Having reminded her of Bohurupee's aim, an aim which the Rangakarmee's playbill echos that through its production it wanted to zoom in on the essential puppetry of humankind, I asked her to tell me how her director asked them to conceive of the performance. Ganguli told me that Tripti Mitra's explanations and directorial interventions convinced her of the director's feminist take on the play. Ganguli said, "Tripti Mitra repeatedly brought my attention to the ill-treatment that Muniya was exposed to. Also she explained it at length how Muniya was reduced to a doll, how she was an object, a historically silent object. She asked me to hammer on the idea. She told me to use the performance to strike out as a woman" (Personal interview 2009).

One is reminded of Tripti Mitra's own account of the reception of *Putul Khela* in which the celebrated actress recounts how conscious she was of "striking at the minds of people" (Ahsanuzzaman187) as she removed the vermilion from the parting of her hair in the final scene. Here one may be reminded of the Mitras' separation as well as Tripti Mitra's unfinished play which, as the noted theatre critic Samik Bandyopadhyay told this author, wished to show an interrogation between the late 19<sup>th</sup> century actress Binodini Dasi and a modern-day actress. These instances led the author to suggest that during her last days, Tripti Mitra became skeptical about the women strides in her own time (Ahsanuzzaman188). Rangakarmee's production thus offered her an opportunity to reinterpret the performance of which she had been an integral part.



That the director was conceiving of the production in feminist terms is also highlighted by its set in that it introduced the motif of a cage.<sup>10</sup> Khaled Chaudhuri who had done a realistic set detailing a middleclass house for *Putul Khela* prepared a cage (see the picture above; Usha Ganguli as Muniya in the foreground; photo courtesy: Rangakarmee) for the Rangakarmee production to visually narrate the director's thought. The design presents Muniya as a caged bird; it also implies that she does not have a home of her own. This is a reviewer's account of the set:

[...] Chaudhuri has combined in the sets the visual, emotional and psychological elements of the play. At the beginning, the curtain rises on an ordinary room, only, with juxtaposed batons where there should be walls. With time, the room took on a prison-cell look—melancholy, cheerless, depressing. The outside atmosphere however, visible through the gaps between the batons, was neither tense nor gloomy. Just normal. The grey of the batons that constituted the "Walls" served two purposes: First, to create a depressing and dreary mood and second, to set as a foil that throws the other colours into relief. (NS: *GH* 34/120)

The account points to the grey batons which gave it a prison-like look highlighting its melancholy, cheerless and depressing atmosphere. A peep through the gaps of the batons unveils the outside world which is "neither tense, nor gloomy", only normal. Muniya slams the door on the melancholy, depressing face of her conjugality to embrace the world outside.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Reichhardt's performance of *A Doll's House* at the Mungo Park Theatre in Copenhagen in 2002 also explained the idea of home in the architecture of a prison. Bent Holm attends to the set of the production as follows: "The scenographic solution visualized a metaphor of the home as a prison. The walls were steel-grey, divided in accurate fields by horizontal and vertical lines, a pattern of lines which was repeated in the floor" (Holm 2009: 12). The Kanthasheelan's production in Dhaka 1993 also made use of the cage concept.



The same reviewer attends to the light scheme as follows:

Tapas Sen's lighting was excellent. I have not seen him devise so articulate a lighting for a long time. It was [...] eminently capable of confirming the moods of the situation. Or rather, it cleared the way for those moods to express themselves. When the lights changed, they did so imperceptibly [sic], with the result that there was no jarring effect at any time. (NS: *GH* 34/120)

Whereas Sen's lighting in *Putul Khela* illumined the arches, his light-work in *Guriya-Ghar* lit up the batons, the prison-cell as well as it revealed the world outside in keeping with the directorial intention.

As regards the performers' role in accomplishing the director's design, Tripti Mitra sat with the performers in groups and individually to convince them about her interpretation of the production. "There were prolonged debates in the rehearsals. Tripti Mitra listened to each and everyone and softly explained her position. She convinced us", Ganguli told this author (Personal interview 2009). By drawing her attention to the playbill announcement that Rangakarmee's choice of the production was not directed by any feminist concerns, I asked her to position herself in the production. "Of course, *A Doll's House* has different layers of meanings which our playbill announced. But, at its immediate level, the Rangakarmee production was surely loaded with feminist interests. We shared in with our director's thought and we never let go the woman issue out of focus" (Personal interview 2009).

The discussion above has made it clear that Rangakarmee's *Guriya-Ghar* was an intervention in Mitra's text and performance, and that feminising of the Bohurupee classic by Tripti Mitra turned it into a political event and statement.

### Reception

As pointed out before, most of the *Guriya-Ghar* spectators had seen the Bohurupee performance. That they had taken *Putul Khela* with them when they entered the theatre to see the Rangakarmee production is revealed in the reception narratives of *Guriya-Ghar* which almost as a rule measured its success /failure against Mitra's production. How *Putul Khela* captivated the *Guriya-Ghar* spectators is best revealed in a feature-article entitled "Hindi theatre: making waves" in the *Business Standard* in 1982 by Ella Dutt in which the writer discusses the Hindi theatre of the 1980s including the Rangakarmee production. Seeing *Guriya-Ghar* for Dutt was revisiting an experience she had gathered years ago:

It was a strange feeling of apprehension and anticipation that gripped me when I went to see this play on a Sunday morning almost 25 years after I first saw Shombhu Mitra's adaptation of the [same] play staged by Bohurupee at New Empire with Shombhu [sic] and Tripti Mitra playing the leads. I can still recall the thrill of recognising a heady and different theatrical experience. I was half afraid that Tripti Mitra's direction would not be free of the earlier play's influence. So overwhelming was its impact. (NS: *GH* 34/116, 1982)

Seemingly, Dutt was still haunted by the Mitra production. So, she was *apprehensive* of the Rangakarmee production that "Tripti Mitra's direction would not be free" of the overwhelming impact of the earlier performance. Dutt was however relieved because what she found in *Guriya-Ghar* was a reinterpretation of the Bohurupee production:

I am happy to say that Tripti Mitra has brought to the play her own interpretation. [...] She] certainly presents the play from the woman's point of view. This seem[s] more so because of the magnificent performance rendered by Usha Ganguli as Munia/Nora. She gradually develops the personality of the woman, the miraculous change from a skittish young woman to a woman of steel rejecting the false security of a home with husband and children in order to seek her own destiny self-reliantly. (NS: *GH* 34/116, 1982)

Dutt appreciates Tripti Mitra's interpretation of the play from woman's perspective and Ganguli's acting which, coupled with "Tapas Sen's lighting scheme", gave the Rangakarmee production a life of its own.

Not all reviewers were, however, as excited as Dutt. Indeed, an unnamed drama critic reviewing *Guriya-Ghar* goes hard on Tripti Mitra for her failure to give a fresh interpretation to the performance. The reviewer slams Khaled Chaudhury for his sacrifice of the rich symbolism which marked the *Putul Khela* set. In the review entitled "'A Doll's House' in Hindi", the reviewer says:

While the acting scheme generally remained reminiscent of the old Bohurupee production, the set design has lost its symbolic richness. The new set design highlights the letter box in the passage behind the door to the flat, and plays more on visual suspense creating a different kind of theatre from the old model. (NS: *GH* 34/129)

Apparently, the reviewer is enthralled by the "the old model", the sacred text, that is, *Putul Khela* which, in the opinion of the critic, has been contaminated by the new production. The detractor is so catholic in his/her admiration of the Bohurupee model that he/she does not recognise the potential of the cage as a symbol. And this is how the critic criticises Tripti Mitra:

One expected Tripti Mitra to reinterpret and rework the play, the way the theatre artists should work and do work elsewhere, whenever they come back to a play either as one in the cast or as director. As an individual grows, a play should grow with him or her. Tripti Mitra, *who has been wasting her energies for several years now just repeating herself in old performances*, could have made a more creative effort with this opportunity. (NS: *GH* 34/129; my emphasis)

Importantly, the reviewer thinks that Tripti Mitra's direction lacked creativity, and as such, *Guriya-Ghar* is a tale of an opportunity ruefully wasted.

In addition to bringing the Bohurupee production to the surface which decidedly shapes the critic's approach to the Rangakarmee production, the review emphasises one paramount feature of performance that it creates a space for the spectators, who, depending on their differing ideological, social, psychological and political positions, differently react to the same performance. While Dutt lauds *Guriya-Ghar* for its reinterpretation of the Bohurupee classic, the unnamed critic slams it precisely because of its absence in the production. Besides, the unnamed reviewer does not have any word of appreciation for Ganguli's acting: "Usha Ganguli as Muniya was more wary than innocent, and could have easily developed that slant still further to give the play a more contemporary look" (NS: *GH* 34/129).

The reviewer also does not spare Pratap Jaiswal as Ajay, the husband who "never measures up to give an impression of the domination that suggests and assures security".

However, the critic who probably had Kumar Roy's performance as Dr Roy in his/her mind, is particularly severe on Ashok Singh, Dr Nigam in the Rangakarmee production:

The only actor in the cast who *mechanically* imitated one of the actors in the old production was Ashok Singh as Dr Nigam. One should remember that gestures and modulations and even mannerisms are most often associated with particular faces and figures and personalities. Once these are dissociated and some other actor tries the same stock, the stock looks like *aping*. (NS: GH 34/129; my emphasis)

To compare one's acting to aping is a clear indication of the reviewer's frustration with Singh's performance. Certainly, 'aping' is a harsh word for describing one's performance. The reviewer opts for it, because he/she finds the acting mechanical, hence lifeless. He/she, however, has some words of praise for Om Pareek, Kundan Mehra (Krogstad) for his bringing in "more of the desperation of the man trying to survive" and for his restoring "the objectivity of the character". Asha Shastri who did Savita Burman-Mrs Linde is also praised, because "she has an even barer kind of neutrality very much in the naturalistic spirit" (NS: GH 34/129).

As regards the dance in the production, the reviewer finds it well-conceived but poorly executed:

The part I did not like about Ms Ganguli's performance was a dance Sequence [sic]. I grant, of course, that this was as much her fault as that of the choreographer, Asit Chatterjee. The dance began with an *insipid something* and ended with an *interminable whirling*. Admittedly, Munia has by now almost lost her mental equilibrium, but that does not necessitate tormenting the audience. (NS: GH 34/120; my emphases)

The critic then explains the function of the tarantella in Ibsen, and argues why the dance in *Guriya-Ghar* does not register: "[t]he original says that Nora danced a tarantella here, which is also a whirling dance, but what was shown here was a half-way house between outer form and inner form, in which neither was emphasised" (NS: GH 34/129).

Elsewhere in the same review the critic talks about the Bohurupee production which reveals that the reviewing process was already burdened with Mitra's production and that the reviewer saw Rangakarmee's success and failure in the light of the benchmark set by *Putul Khela*. This leads me to argue that both the theatre agents and the spectators were "haunted" (Carlson 2) by *Putul Khela*. While the theatre agents including the director, designers and performers worked in tandem to get rid of the Bohurupee apparition, the spectators took the ghost with them to the performance and received the new production vis-à-vis the old one.

## Conclusion

Re-creation is one of the most enchanting and enduring feature of performance. This re-creation is bound to occur in theatre because it is all about translation of a work. The director translates, the performers and the crew translate, and the audiences translate the piece positioning themselves in their respective times and places where the original is continuously debated, contested, defined and redefined.

The fact that Mitra's translation was chosen for performance by Rangakarmee testifies to its greatness and authority. The choice can be also indicative of its desire to strengthen

the position of cultural capital – represented by *Putul Khela* – within the literary and theatrical fields of their culture. One can add to it the lure of commerce. *Putul Khela* was one of the Bohurupee productions which always fetched money for the group. Whenever the group faced financial crisis, it staged either Tagore's *Raktakarabi* or this play, or both. Because the production had already been canonised to an extent in the Kolkata theatre circuit, a revival of it – be it in Hindi or in Mitra's original – was sure to generate enthusiasm among the audiences as well as critics.

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