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Collective Dramaturgy and the Politics of Lived Experience in Habib Tanvir's The Living Tale of Hirma

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Abstract

The Living Tale of Hirma by Habib Tanvir is an important piece of political theatre from India, which blends the Chhattisgarhi folklore theatrical traditions with an analysis of democracy, state power and tribal disenfranchisement. While much scholarship has already been done on the play from historical and political perspectives, relatively little research has been undertaken to analyse dramaturgical techniques employed in plays. The present investigation employs a qualitative research design, focusing on close textual analysis and dramaturgy of *The Living Tale of Hirma* using theories of collective dramaturgy, minor aesthetics, and distributed agency. It deconstructs the conventional idea of narrative power through distributing agency among the chorus, the community and mythic imagination. In contrast, this play presents an alternate conception of democracy based on agency and collective performance. This research makes a contribution to Habib Tanvir and Indian political theatre studies by introducing the concept of minor dramaturgy. The analysis contends that this minor dramaturgy not only interrogates post-independence democratic discourse but also models alternative forms of collective agency, inviting spectators into an active co-creation of meaning.

1. Introduction

Modern conceptions of lived experience are no longer limited to representation, but rather they concern themselves with how subjectivities are co-created through the processes of embodiment, remembering, performing, and political activity. In performance studies, the concept of lived experience does not just involve narration, but performance through the body, voice, ritual, and shared cultural memory. In addition to being a part of the body of work written by first generation playwrights, the inclusion of these plays also illustrates the issues created by establishing a nation since independence through the disillusionment between the ideals of independence and the realities created as a result of corruption, exploitation, caste discrimination, gender oppression and political violence. Each play has its own unique way of depicting the themes being studied and creates a temporal, geographic and social context within that theme which allows them to be used as the basis for understanding how contemporary Indian English Plays critiques authority. The plays form a complete, cohesive unit for understanding how play, power and politics are related in contemporary India because they represent the interconnectedness of caste, class, patriarchy, government and state violence therefore allowing a greater breadth of analysis. It talks about the disillusionment period following independence (1947) and demonstrates the repeated undermining of the promises of freedom and social change by corruption and exploitation which are the result of the continued existence of structural inequalities. The play combines many different types of drama including: ‘folk/drama-based theatre’, ‘political theatre’, ‘satire/social theatre’ and ‘historical drama’. It examines how these forms provide different critiques on power and represents the marginalised not as secondary but as the keys to displaying domination, resistance and political consciousness. Modern Indian English Drama is positioned as a vehicle for societal critique or questioning democracy - rather than an expression of literature.

Habib Tanvir's work, *The Living Tale of Hirma*, provides an important illustration of the theory, as this piece of theatre turns the lived experience of Adivasi communities into collective theatrical performance. In the present political scenario, there have been several discussions and debates regarding democracy, rights of indigenous people, and natural resource extraction that have created an increasing interest in literary and theatre works focusing on marginalized peoples. *The Living Tale of Hirma*, which provides a remarkable dramatic portrayal of the debate related to democracy, state power, and tribal societies (Babu, 2023). This drama is set in the context of the accession of princely states into the Indian union, where there exists a conflict between Hirma Dev Singh Gangavanshi, a princely ruler who wants to keep his estate and a government that wishes to incorporate the kingdom into the democratic state as a symbol of democracy and representing the tribal people (Shutt et al., 2023). The discussion about land expropriation, ecological imbalance, and the erosion of rights of indigenous people make it relevant to the present-day concerns all over the world about development, ecological justice, and marginalized people (Saroj, 2018). Theatre is a form of art that has always played an important role in articulating the experiences of power, memories, and resistance of the community. Instead of being an illustration of political incidents, theatre allows the audience to collectively embody and participate in social reality. This aspect is especially applicable in the context of Indian contemporary theatre.

The Indian Drama has its roots traced back to more than 2500 years. The origin and the development have been divided into three phases (Fig. 1)

The first phase includes Sanskrit Drama in Vedic period which comprises works like *Natyashastra*, *Abhigyan Shakuntalam*, *Mrichchkatika* etc by various profound Sanskrit thinkers. The second phase includes innovative theatre in vernacular, re-emerged in roots. The third and the last phase focuses on the pre-modern and post-modern drama. To shed light on the origin of drama in India, it is present in the forms of performances in rituals, rites and ancient seasonal festivities of Vedic Aryans. There were folk theatrical performances in ancient India in the form of dance, food, rituals. There were references in Vedic literature to dance, song, musical instrument, rites related to *yajanas*; performances of rituals: hunting, birth, death, puberty, marriage, funeral rites; tradition of ballad singing, storytelling; references to dance, music, actor in scriptures like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Bhagavata Puran*, *Markandeya Puran* etc. These instances indicate the presence of theatrical activities in India almost 500 years before the traces of Christian era can be found. The foundations of Modern Indian Drama remain deeply tied to the Parsi theatre movement which dominated urban Indian entertainment from the 1860’s through the 1930’s. This theatrical form was inherently multicultural, bringing together actors and crew members from diverse linguistic, ethnic and religious backgrounds to perform works in Gujarat, Marathi, Urdu and English. Prior to this, the performing arts landscape relied heavily on British-sponsored ‘nautch’ performances patronized by feudal elites. This dymanic shifted when Jamshed Jejeebhoy, Jagannath Shankarseth and Framji Cowasji established the ‘Grant Road Theatre’ to accommodate non-English regional plays. Parsi writers subsequently sought to construct their own distinct historical narrative in Gujarati, leading to regional adaptations of Shakespearean classics like *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Timon of Athens*. Concurrently, the stage brought epic Persian lore to life through performances of the *Shahnama*, *Rustom* and *Sohrab*. The playwrights such as Radhey Shyam

Kathavachak, Agha Hashar Kashmiri and Narayan Prasad Betab significantly elevated the literary caliber of this movement. A localized 'Hindu Theatre' emerged in Bombay, fueled by the classical Sanskrit Drama translations of William Jones and H.H. Wilson. By the late 19th century, this synthesis allowed Western- inspired dramatic styles to firmly take root within indigenous regional languages. Habib Tanvir is recognized as one of the most innovative theatre artists of contemporary India due to his incorporation of Chhattisgarhi folk tradition, nacha, folk music, and amateur performers within the paradigm of Naya Theatre (Hutchison-Poyntz, 2022). Unlike the use of folk traditions just for artistic ends, Tanvir makes use of such traditions for transforming the structure of the theatre by means of episodic narration, choral performance, and collective narration. The existing literature mainly discusses *The Living Tale of Hirma* as an artistic work that criticizes the post-independence era, democracy, state-sponsored development, and the alienation of the tribal community (Babu, 2023). Furthermore, the scholars analyse the combination of Tanvir's Brechtianism, folk theatre, music, dance, and improvisation and their potential in contesting the dominant politics and stimulating the audience to think critically. Although there are numerous positive insights offered by this literature review, an important gap is still present. Namely, most scholarly works concentrate on the historical, political, and ideological aspects of the play but do not pay much attention to its dramaturgic strategies. Namely, no previous study has tried to analyse how Tanvir reshapes dramatic and political agency in his play through the use of episodes, choruses, folk expressions, and performances. Thus, minor dramaturgy and distributed agency remain untouched as potential tools of analysis.

In recent times, trends in performance and dramaturgy studies have been moving away from models of theatre that have focused on text and into models that are more collaborative and relational in nature. According to contemporary theories of dramaturgy, the process of dramaturgy is no longer seen as arising only from the dramatic text but arises as a result of the relation between the performer, audience, environment and practice of theatre (Chakrabarti, 2022). This trend will serve as a good starting point for looking again at *The Living Tale of Hirma*. Given this backdrop, this study suggests that *The Living Tale of Hirma* is an example of minor dramaturgy where notions of sovereignty pertaining to political power are questioned in order to construct the concept of agency as collective, relational and constantly changing. This will be done by analysing the play qualitatively from the point of view of textual and dramaturgical perspectives and demonstrate that the episodic nature of the play, its use of choral interruptions, structural irony and folk idiom help in decentralizing narrative authority and encourage the audience members to become active participants in meaning making (Konar, 2026). Thus, Hirma, as a character, does not become a static hero but rather becomes a dynamic one who is embedded in the context of changing tribal memories, state power, familial relationships, and mythic transfiguration especially as he comes back to life as Mahaprabhu Narangi Wale Baba (Bedre, 2012). Interpretation of the play in terms of minor dramaturgy and distributed agency will thus add to the current debate in Indian political theatre and performance studies.

Theatre has become a central element of performance studies in which these processes can be explored since performance turns the experiential into something social. Different from storytelling, which is written, performance happens through bodily presence, gesture, voice, movement, and audience

engagement, thus making the experiential collective rather than something that needs to be remembered later on. This paper claims that not only does the play *The Living Tale of Hirma* by Habib Tanvir reflect the lived experience of the Adivasi people; but it also dramaturgies the politics of subjectivity through the performance of the chorus. By engaging recent theorization of lived experience and subjectivity with collective dramaturgy, this paper shows how Tanvir converts political theatre into an arena of performance in which democratic subjectivity is enacted, not represented. The rest of this article has been structured into three parts. The first part provides an overview of the literature available regarding Habib Tanvir's political theatre, folk aesthetics and dramaturgy. In the second part, the methodology and the theoretical perspective used for this study have been explained. The third part analyses certain scenes from Habib Tanvir's *The Living Tale of Hirma* to show how minor dramaturgy works in the play and how these results can be useful for contemporary understandings of democracy, political subjectivity and collective action.

2. Literature Review and Research Gaps

2.1 Political readings related to the play

The existing literature on Habib Tanvir's *The Living Tale of Hirma* tends to analyze the play as a political commentary on the nation-building process, democracy, and dispossession of tribals after independence (Bedre, 2012). Instead of treating the play as a simple historical representation of the accession process of the princely states, scholars perceive it as an allegorical account of the contradictions between the ideals of democracy and the developmental practices undertaken by the state. According to Bedre and Gangarde, Hirma symbolizes the conflict between princely sovereignty and the power of the bureaucracy whereby development practices lead to the displacement of tribals as land and natural resources are transferred to private contractors. In a similar vein, Saroj sees the play as a criticism of the discourse of democracy whereby indigenous identities become sidelined under conflicting ideologies (Saroj, 2018). While these analyses demonstrate the political importance of *The Living Tale of Hirma*, their focus is mainly on the interpretive and ideological aspects of the texts. This leaves relatively little room for discussion of the dramaturgical techniques used to convey these political messages.

2.2 Folk, Theatre and community performance

Secondly, some literature has focused on the innovative integration of Chhattisgarhi folklore in contemporary Indian theatre. India's dramatic heritage, during the precolonial period, was sustained and shaped by folk performances and regional vernacular traditions from 800 CE to 1800 CE. This phase was marked by diverse local and traditional performance forms across different regions of the country. Previous studies primarily focus on the fact that he uses nacha, songs, and local actors in an effort to assert indigenous culture over Western theatrical culture (Babu, 2023). Similarly, Mishra asserts that Naya Theatre has democratized theatrical performance through the use of choruses that convey collective social consciousness and educational values (Mishra, 2017). Folk performance is further investigated in more contemporary scholarship through the lenses of postcolonialism and materialism,

focusing on embodiment, resistance, and class struggle. In all these ways, they reveal that the theatre of Tanvir gives precedence to communal performance over individual performance. However, these studies largely pay attention to the socio-cultural importance of these theatrical practices without discussing their role in altering narrative power.

2.3 Contemporary Perspectives on Dramaturgy and Collective Performance

The study of dramaturgy has witnessed a radical change from textual approaches to collaboratively informed theories of drama production. While classical theories of dramaturgical criticism assessed dramatic scripts according to the criteria of unity developed by Aristotle, episodic scripts were perceived as fragmented and unfinished (Dalmia, 2001). Today's academic discourses perceive dramaturgy as a collaborative practice that includes writers, performers, spectators, space, sound, and materiality (Boal, 1985). Under such a scenario, the idea of Boal of simultaneous dramaturgy places emphasis on the participation of the audience and the process through which the spectators become contributors to the theatrical significance. Though such approaches have provided useful theoretical understanding to interpret collective performance, they have not found much use in the case of *The Living Tale of Hirma*. While previous researches recognize the relevance of choruses and participatory performance in Tanvir's drama, they do not often explore the way in which these dramaturgical tools are used to distribute authorship or agency.

2.4 Lived Experience, Subjectivity and Collective Performance

There has been substantial development in relation to the concepts of experience and subjectivity in recent times with the former having been shifted from the realm of being a psychological experience to one of social and political construction. Contemporary humanities studies have maintained that experience is socially constructed and is created by means of the processes of embodied practice, collective memory, spatial relationships, and negotiation of power as opposed to being an individual experience (Table 1). In light of such an approach, it has become clear that the concept of subjectivity is also relational and dynamic. This is especially the case when studying performances by indigenous and community-based traditions, since these experiences tend not to be formed solely through autonomous protagonists. Rather, communal narratives, ritual acts, choral performances, and oral histories create experiences shared amongst performers, spectators, and culture, creating a form of collective subjectivity that defies the individualistic nature of dramatic representation.

These perspectives offer a fruitful starting point for discussing Habib Tanvir's "*The Living Tale of Hirma*." Although the politics behind Tanvir's criticism of democracy and tribal dispossession have been the focus of most critical discussions of the play, much less has been said about how the dramaturgical construction of the piece creates experience as a collective and performative process. The present paper takes the recent discussions of lived experience and political subjectivity as the basis for arguing that "*The Living Tale of Hirma*" is not simply a representation of Adivasi experience, but the creation of

collective political subjectivity through choral performance, folk idioms, participatory spectatorship, and shared culture.

Table 1
Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives on Lived Experience and Subjectivity in Performance Studies.

Researcher	Major Concept	Key Argument	Relevance to Present Study
Meerzon (2020)	Performance and Subjectivity	Subjectivity is produced through embodied encounters between performers and audiences.	Supports the argument that Tanvir's dramaturgy constructs relational political subjectivity.
Bouzioti (2023)	Phenomenology of Performance	Performance provides access to lived experience through embodied practice and phenomenological inquiry.	Explains how bodily performance communicates experiences beyond textual representation.
Jestrovic (2024)	Political Theatre and Collective Subjectivity	Political theatre generates democratic subjectivity through activism, solidarity and collective performance.	Connects Tanvir's folk theatre with collective political agency.
Kear (2024)	Political Performance	Theatre enables audiences to construct political knowledge rather than passively consume representation.	Supports the discussion of participatory spectatorship in *The Living Tale of Hirma*.
Harjunpää et al. (2023)	Embodied Interaction	Subjective experiences are communicated through coordinated bodily action and interaction.	Reinforces the importance of chorus, gesture and collective embodiment in Tanvir's dramaturgy.
Son et al. (2025)	Playback Theatre and Lived Experience	Theatre transforms individual narratives into shared emotional and social experiences through collective witnessing.	Strengthens the interpretation of communal memory and collective lived experience in the play.

2.5 Distributed agency and subjectivity

Another critical line of inquiry relates to evolving ideas of agency in the field of performance studies. Traditionally, literary critics have considered individual characters as the locus of all action and growth in theatre. More recent poststructuralist and new materialist readings problematize this claim by proposing to understand agency as relational and emergent, not static and autonomous. In relation to *The Living Tale of Hirma*, these readings imply that the emergence of political subjectivity is not dependent on the actions of an individual protagonist but occurs as a result of relations between chorus, mythology, landscape, ritual, and memory. Saroj's interpretation of Hirma's mythic journey serves as an example of such relational approach by demonstrating how choral performance undermines sovereignty and

unmasks democracy as symbolic violence against Adivasi lifeworld (Saroj, 2018). Yet contemporary readings do not attempt to combine these theoretical insights with Tanvir's dramaturgy.

2.6 Subalternity and Democracy

Most researchers seem to be of one accord that the main aim of *The Living Tale of Hirma* is to question the contradictory elements of postcolonial democracy and show the exclusionary nature of modernization (Bedre, 2012). Political criticism focuses on the play mainly in terms of the issues that are discussed from a historical perspective such as accession, tribal rights, and democratic governance. However, postcolonial criticism goes an extra mile to expose the instability of subaltern identity and the way in which the choral form resists the dominant discourses of the state. The two critical perspectives have certainly provided a great deal of insight into the political aspects of the play, but unfortunately tend to put more emphasis on the thematic content than the dramatic form.

2.7 Research Gap and Positioning of the Present Study

Previous scholarship on Habib Tanvir gives us great insight into his political vision, folk aesthetics, critique of democracy, and community theatre. Nevertheless, the studies usually consider politics, culture, or theatricality individually. Even though scholars have approached *The Living Tale of Hirma* from a historical, political, and folk-theatrical standpoint, there is not much work done regarding the process through which Tanvir creates lived experiences using dramaturgy. Previous scholarly studies have discussed the notion of democracy and subaltern politics only in an ideological context, but the current article explores the same in the context of theatricality. In addition, none of them explores how those elements work together via specific dramaturgical structures or explains how the agency shifts between chorus, community, myth, landscape, and spectators. Even though there have been many developments in performance theory, which now emphasize collective dramaturgy, distribution of agency, and relational subjectivity, they have not been applied in Habib Tanvir's case of *The Living Tale of Hirma*. This research fills this lacuna by bringing together the political theatre literature with current theories of performance. Minor dramaturgy is put forward as the theoretical model that can explain the way Tanvir uses episodic organization, choric interventions, folk tropes, and mythic imagination to redistribute theatrical power and form the collective political subjectivity. With this step, the current research takes the scholarly discussion further from merely theme-oriented analysis into the formal analysis of dramaturgy as such political practice.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research questions

The present study is based on following research questions:

Q.1: How is minor dramaturgy employed in *The Living Tale of Hirma* to challenge conventional models of dramatic structure and political expression?

Q.2: How are dramatic agency and political agency redistributed by the narrative strategies of episodic narrative, choral interruptions, folk performance, and mythic imagination in the play?

Q.3: How is political subjectivity transformed by the interplay of collective performance and distributed agency?

3.2 Research design and approach followed in present study

This study uses an interpretive research design, which draws on literary and performance approaches. Instead of using empirical tools such as surveying and experimenting, it makes use of textual reading and dramaturgical analysis as the way to explore the political dimensions of the formal structures of *The Living Tale of Hirma* (Creswell, 2013). Similar to Pavis, the dramatic text is considered not only as a literary piece but as a performative score organized by its dramaturgical structures (Pavis, 1998). This study is placed into the hermeneutic tradition of theatre studies, whereby interpretation occurs through iterative interaction between textual evidence and theoretical perspective. The idea of minor dramaturgy is employed as the main interpretive framework that allows a recurrent analysis of the dramaturgical structures of the play without any preformed categories.

3.3 Primary text, data source and theoretical framework

The history of Indian Drama begins with the Sanskrit plays which are generally dated from 300 BCE to 800 CE. These plays serve as a vehicle of instruction and not only the source of entertainment. The aim of such play is to preserve the moral values of India, and this can be done by portraying the reality in a subtle manner. They present pictures of socio-cultural-political life of those times. Sanskrit plays depict emotions, ideas, strengths and weaknesses, desires and aspirations. *Natyashastra* by Bharata is the first and foremost prescriptive text about the performance. It not only talks about the components but also the effects of dramaturgy. It is considered as an etched work which includes thirty-seven chapters and looks at the minute details and scope of dramaturgy. This text about rules and regulations and Arts Poetics by Greek philosopher Aristotle go parallel. While Aristotle talks about the process of “Catharsis” which generates therapeutic effects experienced by the audience after the performance, Bharata talks about the process of *Rasa* which is an organic production within the audience. While Aristotle places emphasis on forced emotions, Bharata reflects upon the natural awakening of emotions from the audience. For Bharata, drama is *loka-vritti*, (imitation of men and their doings). There are 6000 *shlokas* in thirty-six chapters and Sanskrit thinker Abhinavagupta divided the thirty-six chapters in two parts.

The basic corpus includes the English translation of Habib Tanvir's "*The Living Tale of Hirma,*" which is contained in the book "Charandas and Other Plays" (Tanvir, "Charandas and Other Plays"). This translation has been used due to the scholarly availability of the source, but at the same time keeping its performative qualities intact. In order to provide a context for the textual analysis, the researcher also makes use of Hindi scripts, production reviews and performance recordings of the Naya Theatre productions (Rai, 2025). Adaptations that took place later and that did not have any involvement of the

playwright in them have been deliberately ignored by the researcher. Analysis integrates three interlocking frameworks: collective dramaturgy, emphasizing choral and participatory structures; minoritarian aesthetics from Deleuze and Guattari, and new materialist concepts of becoming and distributed agency, where non-human elements (landscape, myth) co-produce action. The combination of these lenses will constitute a method of operationalising a concept defined as minor dramaturgy by describing how the episodic breaks, interruptions and irruptions of folk and myth displace sovereign control of narrative. This theoretical framework has been created using selected aspects from the area of performance studies rather than relying on professional application, prioritising the resonance of the text above the purity of the theory. The theoretical framework of present study is shown in Fig. 2.

3.4 Analytical procedure

Following interconnected stages were followed for the analysis:

Stage 1

The whole twelve scenes of the drama were studied in order to observe episodic structure, choric interjections, scene shifts, and non-linearity of the story.

Stage 2

Dialogues, music, stage directions, and other performative indicators were examined to detect any recurring pattern in agency assignment. Special emphasis was laid on scenes such as Hirma's dealing with the state agents, the execution song, and the apotheosis scene because dramaturgy is quite clear in these scenes (Katz, 2017).

Stage 3

The discovered dramaturgical techniques were then analysed through the lenses of minor dramaturgy, collective performance, and distributed agency. Thematic coding was initially performed through NVivo software before manual interpretation through hermeneutics for consistent concepts (Ahmedova, 2025).

Stage 4

The identified pattern was interpreted to explain episodic narration, chorus folk idioms and mythic imagination and construct political subjectivity across the play.

3.5. Research credibility

For increased credibility of analysis, an iterative approach to reading, triangulation by theory and constant comparisons between the textual evidence and the literature that already exists regarding Habib Tanvir and current performance theories were used. The interpretation was based on the analysis of the texts while being verified with the help of the existing literature.

3.6. Limitations

However, since the play text has been written, this study will concentrate mainly on the textual material and not on its actual performance as there are some limitations in studying the improvisational and interaction aspects inherent in the Naya Theatre. There could be some loss of linguistic and performance aspects due to translation from Chhattisgarhi to Hindi and then into English. Being interpretive in nature, the study may be open to the problem of having a theoretical bias towards poststructuralist interpretations. This issue was overcome by relying on evidence from texts and through critical engagement with different historic and political interpretations of the text (Creswell 200). Thirdly, the study is focused on *The Living Tale of Hirma* alone and does not do any comparative work on the play vis-a-vis other plays like Charandas Chor. Future work could include these approaches to extend the scope of this study (Patton 250).

4. Results

4.1 Dramaturgical Structure: Episodes, Chorus, and Irony

Unlike the classical Aristotle theory of drama, which is based on the principle of the continuity of action and unity of dramatic development, the structure of the drama *"The Living Tale of Hirma"* is entirely different in form. Tanvir divides the drama into two acts and twelve episodic scenes, each of which is two to three pages long and linked by the sudden change of chorus in the place of action (Tanvir, 2013). The first act climaxes in the negotiations between Hirma and the state officials (Scenes 3–6), where political compromise seems to be the solution to the central conflict. Yet, Act 2 deliberately challenges the sense of closure provided by disrupting the political conflict in the previous act through the repetition of songs, retold myths, and communal storytelling (Bedre, 2012). The play continually delays resolution, which creates a structure that is ironical because each political solution produces more conflicts.

The quantitative data also illustrates the significance of collective dramaturgy. The choral acts take place in 7 out of 12 scenes (58%), which means that the chorus is one of the most significant aspects of dramaturgy of the drama. For instance, there is a song called "Two kinds of people" that constantly interrupts the individual dialogues and provides collective interpretation of political events. Rather than helping to develop Hirma's personal story, the chorus distributes the interpretative power in favour of the community and makes spectators look at political events collectively. Thus, episodic structure, chorus and structural irony are the elements of minor dramaturgy that substitute linear development for the open process of collective becoming.

4.2 Choral Songs and Collective Voice

Choral performances offer the main means for producing collective vocal expression since they occur much longer than either character’s individual speeches as well as thematically reflecting their character’s particular viewpoints about the given issue (Kunreuther, 2018). As Tanvir writes, “For ages, the songs and dances of the people have been flourishing in the districts of Titur Basna”. The first piece

performed at the outset of the second act provides us with two general social conditions and the entire group of *adivasi* perform together while the same text would be recited again after negotiation had taken place in order to illustrate the inability of individuals to resolve basic social issues on the base of their own agency. The analysis includes diagnostic (identifying class divisions); interruptive (disrupting Hirma's monologues) and spectator (calling upon the audience to take part in the action of the play). In scene 8 the choral ensemble performs the execution ballad and together the choral members collectively act out the "death" of Hirma, incorporating real life accounts of the event and mythological foreshadowing to create a collaborative dramatic solution for how both performer and implied audience create and tell the same story. The choral lines represent 22% of the spoken dialogue but comprise 40% of the ideological pivots present within the text.

4.3 Hirma as Becoming-Leader: Ambivalence and Fragmented Agency

The characterization of Hirma departs from psychological continuity into the process of becoming, from Feudal Father Figure in Scene One to the State's Victim in Scene Seven and to Mythical Saint in Scene Twelve. His negotiation speech offered a promise of autonomy for the tribe while simultaneously sacrificing land. He embodies Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a "line of flight" (or escape), from fixed subjectivity. After his execution, the chorus transforms Hirma into "Mahaprabhu Narangi Wale Baba", while the two severed hands provide a symbol/postulate for the fragmentation of Hirma's agency among body parts, in the communal memory and through superstitions (Lambert et al. 2019). His portrayal as both oppressor and martyr, as well as deity, provides the reader with an alternative mode of embracing and understanding leadership through relational networks, in contrast to traditional heroic models. Of the 18 speeches delivered by Hirma, 11 were interrupted by the chorus or other family members, demonstrating the loss of sovereignty by Hirma. The use of folk elements and the construction of more-than-human agencies serve to recreate and thereby problematize rationalist plot constructions. Hirma's body merging with the superstition that "bullets turn to water" (which he is not) creates a mythical being whose existence as a being is dependent on the performative force created by *adivasi* beliefs, while subordinating bureaucratic executions. The *Nacha*-style songs performed by the rickshaw puller in Scene Ten invoke the landscape surrounding him (forests functioning as ancestral agents), as do the objects in the episodes (i.e. the rifle that Hirma must use to kill was a reluctant killer) (Colliander, 2024). From a new materialist perspective, the persistence of a non-human being is illustrated through the "ghost of Hirma" whose "ghost hand" holds the rickshaw puller, thereby ironicizing state violence. The dramaturgy at work causes a deterritorialization of folk idioms (approximately 70% of the dialogue was in the Chhattisgarhi language), through the fissure between the modernist form of dialogue and the pre-modernist form of oral-collective, as opposed to literate-individualistic, logics.

4.4 Community, Compromise, and Deferred Revolution

Through repeated compromises, a cyclical tragic form is created around the prevention of collective action. The mass meeting (scene 5) represents the last point of building the momentum for a revolution with the act of Hirma giving in and entering the choral lament. Analysing structure, we can see that there

are four cycles of structure to this creation: building up (community rally), peak (confrontation), compromising and finally deferring (the song or myth). This structure creates a collective agency that is emergent and limited, leading to an invitation for critique without being able to enact catharsis. The ambiguous renewal at the end of the theatre piece keeps the ongoing process of revolution alive; the revolution will continue to progress without defining success or failure.

4.5 Spectatorship and Implicit Simultaneous Dramaturgy

In open-ended forms, an audience can create in a collaborative manner. Scenes 4's land rights debacle and the repeated use of choral direct address (5 times) are both examples of the Boal's Forum Theatre and enable the audience to exist as an ethical agent. Hirma's fate being elevated to a state of uncertainty requires the audience to interpret and assume a position of "intellectual mise-en-scène" between the stage and the audience. Hence, minor dramaturgy is not limited to just text but will be extended to the entirety of performances produced.

5. Discussion

5.1 Towards a Concept of Minor Dramaturgy in Hirma

The study demonstrates that minor drama is a collection of structural elements, such as episodic form, choral interruptions, structural irony, and folk undoing. These create an environment that disrupts the power of the unified narrative of sovereignty (Deleuze, 1986). In addition to the differences in structure and form, minor drama also produces numerous new meanings by presenting them as rhizomatic[5], devoid of centralized authority. Contrary to the telos of major drama, Hirma creates a fragmentation of twelve scenes—58% via chorus—resulting in a rhizomatic structure whereby different actors consolidate authority within differing communities, landscape agents, and gaps in spectacle. The extent of the political nature of the scale of minor drama further emphasizes the subversive qualities of traditional metropolitan theatre conventions using *adivasi* forms of expression just as Hirma resists the national integration of his estate. Consequently, minor drama can be viewed as a practice of the marginalized whereby the disjointed structures of form reflect the indecisiveness of subaltern communities.

5.2 The Process Creates a Community of Agents

Hirma's evolution from feudal lord to mythic saint reinforces the collective agency concept; or how subjectivity is created within the context of an assembly of families, chorus, state sanctioned violence and superstition. Hirma's three cycles of compromise demonstrate that society as a whole possesses collective agency; as the community rallies to build momentum for change, the deferral to choral authority redistributes the power to decide, which is consistent across the uses of collective or collaborative drama by Boal, whereby performers model interruption through action that encourages audience participation. The 40% of ideological pivots within the control of the chorus confirmed the shift of drama away from supporting the notion of individual accomplishments to collectively becoming

connected to one another, thereby creating a challenge to humanist models that exist in traditional Tanvir performances.

5.3 Rethinking Democracy, State, and Subaltern Voice

This play may be said to reveal the nature of democracy and reveal how state language manipulates the meaning of welfare vis-a-vis land acquisition using choral binary oppositions, which makes Hirma and the bureaucrat equal participants in the shared irony of the performance. The minor mode preserves the uncertainty and indecisiveness of subalterns in terms of whether there will be a restoration of feudalism or the triumph of the state, thereby allowing individuals who are a*divasi* to continue living in their 'lifestyle' as those individuals remain as "individuals in process". Therefore, Tanvir's theatrical work represents a third space that can be positioned as the critique of collective voice without establishing a new normative voice when analyzed using postcolonial historiography's linearity of progressive history.

5.4 Impact of Hirma on Studies of Political Theatre and Dramaturgy in India

For practitioners of political theatre in India, Hirma extends the boundaries of the folk-modernist experiments done by both Safdar Hashmi to produce agitprop, and Girish Karnad as mythico-allegorical example of "choral collectivity", which illustrates how the choral collective is a strategy for subaltern discourse. On a global scale, the concept of the minor mode offers a basis for the analysis of theatre produced in the Global South—i.e. Non-professional performers, choral interruption of ritual and mythic agency/non-humanity, viewed in opposition to Eurocentric theatre practices. It provides a way of considering how the processional turn of performance studies intersects with post colonialist critique and can be viewed as participatory pedagogical forms of democracy. The future of theatre around 1940's took a backseat in most parts of Indian and languages. The formation of IPTA, 'Indian People's Theatre Association' (1943) took a turn and tried to bring back life to the theatre in India. The aim of IPTA is to place focus on the local performative forms by going against the commercial glamour of contemporary theatre and reject the colonial commercial forms of the 19th century. According to thinker Malini Bhattacharya, IPTA has two objectives: to develop experimental forms outside the naturalistic confines of commercial theatre and to present real contemporary struggles against fascism, imperialism and economic exploitation by drawing from India's traditional arts (Bhattacharya 7). This led to the formation of many more theatres.

5.5 Directions for Future Research

A text-centric analysis that focuses on text-based translation can devalue (or reduce) the Chhattisgarhi experience of improvisation that is embodied in performance. Where the researcher is biased towards a new materialist frame, this may create over-theorization of textual gaps as being purposeful, agentic and intentional. Ethnographic extensions of this research could include various ethnographies of rehearsal with *Naya Theatre*, audience responses from *adivasi* audiences, and comparing contemporary tribal theatre with examples such as Preti Jain's Forest Queen. Archival video analysis of performances in the 1980s would also provide empirical evidence in support of simultaneous dramaturgy claims.

6. Conclusion

The present paper analyses Habib Tanvir's *The Living Tale of Hirma* under the theory of minor dramaturgy, aiming to explore the redistribution of dramatic and political agency facilitated by the dramaturgy of this work. Through combining the concepts of collective dramaturgy, minor aesthetics, and new materialism, it becomes clear how Tanvir uses elements such as episodic narrative, choral performance, folklore language, and mythopoeic imagination in order to question the dramatic tradition, which is based on an individual character and linear storytelling. These results reveal that in this play the episodic nature of its construction, recurrent choral presence and structural irony result in the decentralization of narrative authority and the creation of a performance space as a site of negotiation of political meaning. Additional evidence of the intentional redistribution of dramatic authority from the individual to the collective comes from quantitative observations: the number of choral interruptions in the course of twelve scenes and their frequent interruption of Hirma's monologues. Democracy as presented in the play becomes the process of collective participation rather than a finished political concept.

Thus, this research contributes to Habib Tanvir scholarship as it focuses more on the formal aspects of the playwright's work rather than on the historically and ideologically motivated approach to Habib Tanvir's plays. It also contributes to contemporary performance studies as it demonstrates the applicability of the concept of minor dramaturgy for analysing distributed agency, collective performance and political subjectivity in Indian political theatre. The connection between dramaturgical analysis and questions of democracy, subalternity and performance makes it possible to develop a new perspective on theatrical form as a mode of political intervention. Rather than representing the lived experiences of marginalized communities as completed narratives, Tanvir constructs a theatrical space in which lived experience remains collective, embodied and continually negotiated. Political subjectivity is therefore produced through dramaturgical participation rather than individual consciousness alone. The analysis of *The Living Tale of Hirma* is based only on the textual and dramaturgical aspects of the play, not including any kind of research on the reception of the work or its performances. Further research might be done on the basis of these results by means of comparing other works of Habib Tanvir, performance ethnology, rehearsals, or reception research.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this publication.

Author Contribution

V.G.: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology Resources, Validation, Visualization, Writing – Original Draft; A.K.D.: Supervision, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing; Project Administration

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Data availability

Not Applicable

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Figures

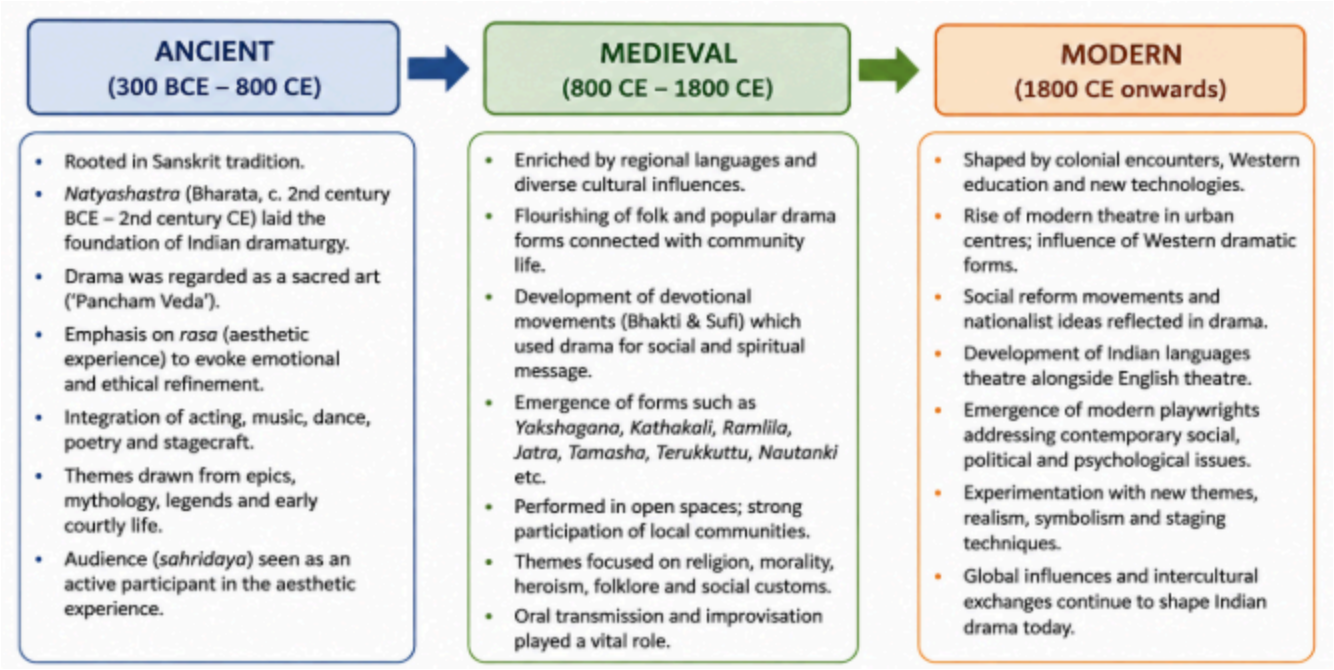


Figure 1

Evolution of Indian Drama from the Ancient to the Modern Period.

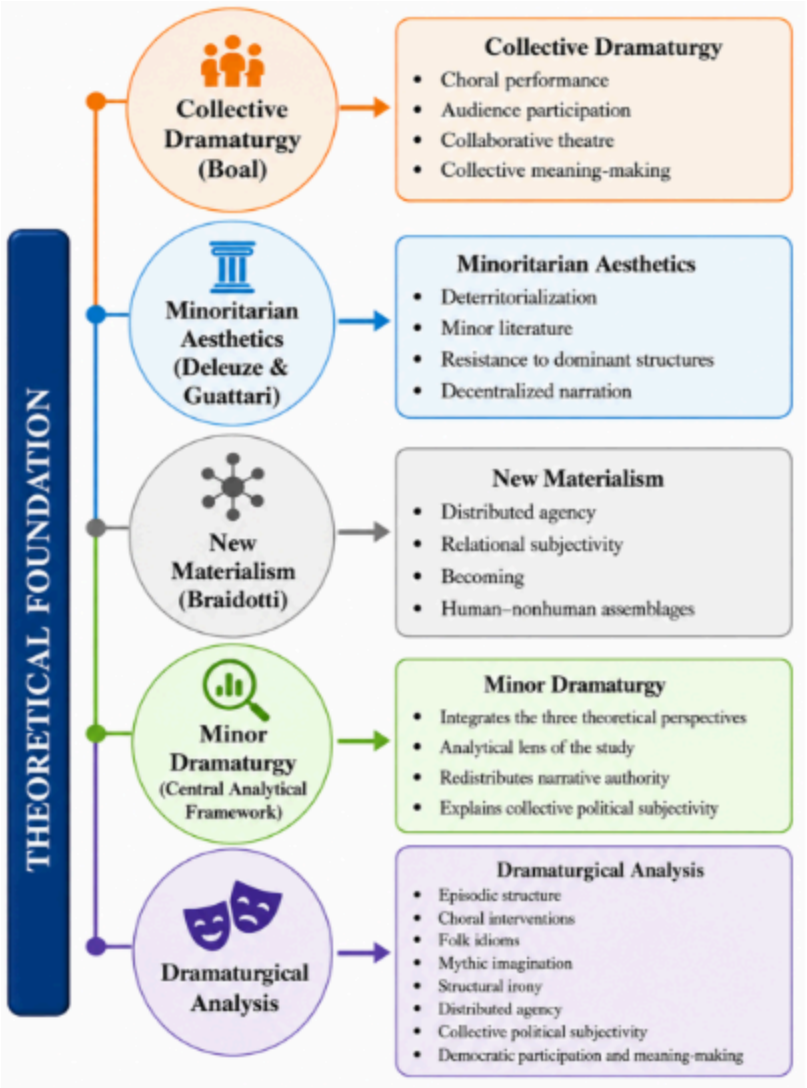


Figure 2

Schematic representation of theoretical framework followed in present study.