

# IPTA and the Music of Assam

*Prachee Dewri*

In 1945, Hemango Biswas (1912-1987) went on a tour all over Assam with the “Surma Valley Cultural Squad”. During this tour, the troupe also went to Tezpur, where Biswas met Jyotiprasad Agarwala (1903-51), who was a cultural icon at that time. It was this meeting that led to the establishment of the Assam State Committee of the Indian People’s Theatre Association in 1948, with Agarwala as President, Bishnuprasad Rava (1909-69) as Vice-President and Hemango Biswas as General Secretary.

Jyotiprasad Agarwala and Bishnuprasad Rava had already begun experimenting with music in the mid-1930s. The 1930s and 40s were significant decades in the evolution of music in Assam. The availability of technology for the recording and reproduction of music, along with significant political developments such as the intensification of the nationalist freedom struggle, brought about a revolution in the music of the region. In the 1940s, the rising discontent among landless peasants in the region and the availability of Communist literature and contact with Communist groups also influenced the music of the region. The formation of the Assam branch of the Indian People’s Theatre Association was particularly significant, as it inspired musicians to experiment with music and explore existing genres of music to create a popular idiom which would address and reflect the contemporary concerns of common people. This paper is an attempt to understand the impact of the IPTA on the music of Assam.

However, the beginnings of this revolution in music must be traced back to the late nineteenth century when artists such as Lakshmiram Barua (1865-1914), Ambikagiri Raichowdhury (1885-1967) and Lakshminath Bezbaroa (1885-1967) had begun writing songs which reflected the contemporary political and social milieu. Barua, Raichowdhury and Bezbaroa were inspired by the recognition of Asamiya as a distinct language in 1873, which marked the strengthening of regional nationalism in Assam. While Asamiya writers such as Lakshminath Bezbaroa and Kanak-lal Barua (1872-1940) began making efforts to enrich Asamiya literature

and drama, and transform Asamiya into one of the “richest and most advanced languages of the world.”<sup>1</sup> Musicians of the region also made efforts to create new music in the Asamiya language.

These efforts gained momentum in the 1920s and 30s, when artists like Agarwala, Rava, and Parvati Prasad Baruva (1904-64) began experimenting with different musical forms of the region. The availability of recording technology added further impetus to their experiments. In the mid-1930s, along with other musicians of the region, Agarwala and Rava began to make use of recording technology available in Kolkata (then Calcutta) to record the traditional music of the region as well as their own music. The songs that were written during this period came to be known as the beginning of *adhunik saegit* in Assam.

The music that was composed before the 1930s was influenced by the music of Bengal and Hindustani classical music. Although one cannot see a definite break in the kind of music created, and although even Agarwala and Rava’s music was influenced by music from outside the region, practitioners of this period try to make a distinction between their music and that of the musicians preceding this period. Many Assamese musicians say that music prior to this period was “bangaluwa.” The word “bangaluwa” means “foreign” or “alien”. However, this term is not entirely accurate, because it is sometimes difficult to distinguish some of the music of this region from that of its neighbouring regions, as there are a lot of overlapping forms, such as the Bhaowaia, which is sung both in Assam as well as Bengal. It would also be inaccurate to say that there was a complete rejection of classical music in the 1930s because both Agarwala and Rava did not forget their training in Hindustani Classical music, but used it for creating a new kind of music, using their technical knowledge of *sur* and *tala* to create a new kind of music using indigenous forms of music. One of Rava’s proteges, Mahesh Saikia says about Rava, “He used to tell us from time to time, ‘You know, at present, there are many singers in Assam who have not learnt classical music but still sing very well. Their technique is to observe and listen and then perform. This technique is not scientific. It’s an old-fashioned technique. If one takes this path, there is the danger of faltering at every step, and that is why so many ragas of the *bargit* tradition are beginning to disappear and remain preserved only in books.” In a personal interview, Sudakshina Sarma (Bhupen Hazarika’s sister), who was trained by Rava, also says that he was successful in collecting the popular forms of music from all over the region, when no recording facilities existed, only because he knew classical music, and could write down those songs and melodies in the form of *swaralipi*. Therefore,

perhaps this music was not marked by a complete break from past traditions, but by change in the focus of the practices of the artists in terms of subject matter, and the sources they drew on for inspiration. It was more of an assimilation of older practices and the unearthing of traditions that were in the margins.

Jyotiprasad Agarwala was a writer, playwright, filmmaker, musician who played a significant role in shaping Asamiya literature, art and culture in the early twentieth century. He was a member of one of the richest families of Tezpur, which had migrated from Rajasthan in the nineteenth century. Agarwala's great-grandfather, Navarangaram Agarwala, had started his life in Assam by working in a Marwari trading firm. He went on to start his own shop and soon rose in wealth and stature. He gradually became a revenue collector and by 1833, the British administration appointed him as the *mouzadar* (revenue collector) of three *mouzas*. Apart from becoming a landowner in Assam, the Agarwala family also blended into the social fabric of Assam, when Navarangaram Agarwala married two Assamese women. Agarwala's grandfather was instrumental in publishing the literary works of Sankaradeva (1449-1568) and Madhavadeva (1489-1596), the neo-Vaishnavite saints of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Agarwala's father Paramananda Agarwala was a singer and instrumentalist who was member of the Tezpur Concert associated with the Ban Theatre.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1920s, Jyotiprasad Agarwala had gone to Edinburgh University to pursue his graduation, but he came back to India in 1933, without completing his studies. Although he did not acquire his degree, he did come back with the knowledge of Western classical music and film-making. At Edinburgh, he met cultural figures like dramatist Adelphe Apia, sculptor Jacob Epstein and film-maker Himangshu Ray. In 1929, he travelled to Berlin to undertake training in film-making from Himangshu Ray. He also learnt about the trends in German, French, Russian, British and American film-making. In 1933, he began making the first Asamiya film *Jaymati* (1935).<sup>3</sup>

Rava was a multifaceted personality, widely known as a Communist leader who mobilised the peasants of Assam to rise in armed struggle against the *mouzadars*. He was also known as a dancer, artist, singer, dancer, actor, playwright, film-maker, and litterateur. He was an active member of the Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI) from 1945 onwards, and later left the RCPI and joined the Communist Party of India. During the 1920s, Rava was a young man actively involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement. In 1926, he had gone to Kolkata for his higher education, but his education was interrupted because of the ha-

rassment of the British police. His stay in Kolkata was important because this is where he met and was exposed to the work of cultural practitioners like Sisir Kumar Bhaduri and the Tagore family. He also met Anna Pavlova when she came to perform in Kolkata. She advised him to go back to Assam and to study the traditional music and dance forms of Assam by visiting the ancient temples and other religious centres. Rava considered this a milestone in his life. So, when he finally had to return to Assam in 1930, he began to tour composite Assam, visiting all the Vaishnav religious centres (*sattras*), and studying the Sattriya culture as Pavlova had advised him. This is when Rava began to secularise and popularise the Sattriya culture. He was responsible for bringing Sattriya dance and music out of the confines of the *sattras*. He was himself a dancer, and performed Sattriya Nritya in various places in Assam as well as outside it; for instance, he performed the Tandava Nritya in Benaras Hindu University in 1939. He also discovered dancers like Jatindranath Goswami, who later went on to become consummate practitioners who also began to experiment with the form and content of Sattriya Nritya performances. Rava also explored the cultures of the various ethnic groups of the region and incorporated them in his creations. Around the same time that Rava returned to Assam, Jyotiprasad Agarwala too returned to Assam, with knowledge of Western classical music and film-making.<sup>4</sup>

The partnership between Agarwala and Rava began in 1933, when Rava assisted Agarwala in making *Jaymati*. He also directed the music of Agarwala's play *Karengar Ligiri* (The Maid at the Palace), first staged in 1934, where, for the first time, the audience heard local tunes played with a combination of indigenous and western musical instruments.<sup>5</sup> This performance was also significant because the orchestra was an all-woman orchestra.

From 1935 onwards, Agarwala and Rava recorded their songs, which became very popular in the region. It must be pointed out that recording was difficult in the early twentieth century, because the nearest recording facility was in Kolkata, and thus, involved a long arduous journey by train and ferry with singers and instrumentalists. Sudakshina Sarma told me in her interview about one of these journeys in 1943, when she was about nine years old. She was supposed to take part in the recording of a play on the Vaishnav saint Sankaradeva, when she contracted typhoid. In fact, Rava's wife, Priyabala Datta also died of typhoid after one of these journeys in 1937.

The songs during this period were infused with a nationalist sentiment, and they also reflected the local culture. The peasants of Assam featured a lot in Rava's songs during this period. He began to write about the

farmers, workers, the women, and people from various tribes. One such recording was the song “Kacate Kalaci Lai” With a Pitcher on her Waist composed by Rava, which was sung by the ten-year-old Bhupen Hazarika, or Master Bhupen Hazarika (as mentioned in the record label) in 1935. He began to write about the farmers, workers, the women, and people from various tribes. The song is a sketch of rural life, but out of all the people, Rava chooses to focus on the marginal figure of the ‘*racaki bai*’, (flighty sister) who also features in Rava’s later music. ‘*racaki*’ in Asamiya means a wide range of things, starting from a stylish, vivacious woman to a flirty, coquettish woman. It is often used as a pejorative term, but Rava sees a lot of potential in this flighty, flirty woman:

*Kacate kalaci lai,  
Jai oi racaki bai  
Saponar saphura caku juri lai  
Saragar amiya bharai oi racaki bai*  
(With a pitcher on her waist,  
There she goes, our *racaki bai*.  
With a casket of dreams in her eyes,  
With the nectar of love,  
There she goes, our *racaki bai*).

This same *racaki bai* reappeared when he started writing progressive music in the 1940s, as he used this same trope to inspire the women of Assam:

O *racaki bai*  
Wake up,  
Open your doors  
There’s very little time.  
There the princely sun  
Pours his nectar  
Sitting on his eastern throne.

The political climate of Assam began to change in the late 1930s, as Communist parties began to establish themselves in Assam. In 1938, Saumyendranath Thakur of the Communist League (later named Revolutionary Communist Party of India) came and established the Radical Institute in Guwahati. This Institute became the centre for the training of the youth in Marxist politics. In 1939, the Assam branch of the Communist League was established, along with the Sadou Assam Pragatisheel Yuvak Santha. And in 1943, the Assam branch of the Communist Party of

India was set up in Guwahati. Rava became actively involved in the Radical Institute, and began an extensive study of Marxist literature. Agarwala was a Congressman during the Independence movement, but was later disillusioned with the Congress Party, only to be influenced by Marxist thought immediately. It is during this period that both Agarwala and Rava began to think and theorise about the role and identity of the artist (*shilpi*) and the role of culture in society.

In 1945, Rava joined the Revolutionary Communist Party. That very same year, he summed up his aesthetics in his speech delivered at the Bihu Conference held in Kaniha. This speech was published as a booklet titled *Asamiya Krstir Camu Abhas (A Brief History of Assamese Culture)*.<sup>6</sup> In this speech, Rava sums up his understanding of Assamese culture, and traces the evolution of this culture. He says that Bihu, which is the seasonal folk festival belonging to every community of this region, is the basis of this culture. He also recognises the colossal contribution of Sankaradeva. He says that the Sattriya culture created by Sankaradeva belongs to the common people of Assam. This forms the basis of his drive to secularise the art and culture of the *sattrra*.

He went on to chart out the future that he envisions for Assamese literature and culture. He felt that the culture of Assam was becoming stagnant, and did not reflect the society of the early twentieth century. He states the importance of bringing the lives of the oppressed classes into literature and art, but also points out that this representation must be from the perspective of those classes themselves. He also points out the necessity of reviving and modernising older forms of cultural expression, like Ojha Pali, Bhaona, and Sattriya culture.

When the Assam IPTA was formed in 1947, Jyotiprasad Agarwala was its founding President. In 1948, Agarwala summed up his views on the role of the artist in society during his presidential speech in the All Assam Artist's Association, Sibsagar. This speech was published as *Silpir Prithibi* (The Artist's World). In *Shilpir Prithibi* (1948), Agarwala says that every human being is an artist, someone who can turn a dream, a thought into reality. But the artist in every human being needs to be awakened; and to take the world of the artist to its zenith, the artist must understand humanity. Till this time, Agarwala's creations were steeped in mythology, particularly that of Krishna, and Usha and Anirudha. These are myths which have been closely associated with his understanding of Assam and Tezpur, because both he and Rava considered Tezpur or Sonitpur to be the birthplace of the myth of Usha Anirudha myth, since Sonitpur was considered to be the ancient kingdom of King Banasur. His initiation to Marxist literature,

however, did not lead to the rejection of these myths. Rather, it led to their reinterpretation. He says that despite so much civilisation, human beings have been unable to tame the ancient barbaric fear of other communities. That is why all communities are constantly fighting to destroy each other. This has led to communities to blame other cultures for their own conflicts, and has also led them to disregard their own cultures, or has led to the failure to internalise this culture. This is the unsolved predicament of the world. He says that Krishna, Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad had tried to solve this very problem, and so do people like Marx, Lenin, Aurobindo, Rabin-dranath, Gandhi and Assam's very own Sankaradeva. Every age had its own form of violence and exploitation, which Agarwala calls "*dushkriti*". The present age faces the *dushkriti* of capitalism and imperialism. This *dushkriti* must be replaced by *sanskriti*. This is the task that lies in front of the artist.

This new consciousness is reflected in Agarwala's music too. One of the most popular songs by Agarwala is "Tore More Alokore Jatra":

*Tore more alokare jatra*  
*Abyartha, abyartha.*  
*Ami palu jiwanar artha abhinava*  
*Swagata swagata satirtha*  
*Swagata swagata satirtha.*  
 (This journey of light,  
 Yours and mine,  
 Is not in vain;  
 Is not in vain.  
 We have found a new meaning of life.  
 Welcome, my comrades, welcome.  
 Welcome, my comrades, welcome).

The song goes on to celebrate the birth of the revolutionary spirit which embarks on a journey of light. This song was written in 1948, the year the IPTA was established in Assam. Perhaps he expresses his exhilaration at embarking on the IPTA journey. This song is interesting because firstly, the composition is complex, and perhaps the melody is classical based. Secondly, the language is highly Sanskritised.

Agarwala often used Sanskritised language while expressing an exalted mood, and while writing about abstract ideas like awakening (*jagriti*), revolution (*biplab*). Perhaps the fact that most abstract and theoretical words in the Asamiya language are Sanskritised is also a reason for the use of such vocabulary.

This song is still popular in Assam. One of the interesting aspects of the after-life of IPTA songs in Assam is that these songs have not disap-

peared. They may have just lost their earlier political context. This song is a case in point. It is now sung in many social functions as a welcome song, be it in some freshers' party, or some government sponsored cultural function. The meaning of the word 'satirtha' or 'comrade' is lost, and simply means 'friend', and the call to the revolutionary spirit is lost in the exhilaration of the welcome.

Rava's music, on the other hand moved closer to the soil. Speaking about Agarwala and Rava, Bhupen Hazarika says that Rava's consciousness traversed close to the soil, whereas Agarwala's consciousness floated above the soil but never quite lost touch with it. There was no known debate about art between the two. These two slightly different perspectives seemed to complement each other. During the late 1940s, Rava continued to draw vignettes of the life of the peasant, as his repertoire of characters began to include people from marginalised ethnic communities. He wrote songs like "Bol Bol Bol Bol" which call upon the peasants and workers to revolt against the greedy landlords and capitalists. This song had direct references to Shelley's "Song: To the Men of England". Rava's trajectory is even more interesting because unlike Agarwala, he was actively involved in the RCPI, and when the Communist parties were banned in 1948, sadly, the very year the IPTA was established in Assam, he had to go into hiding. He remained underground till 1952, after which he was arrested. Most of his songs were written during this period, when he was travelling from village to village escaping from the police, and at the same time organising armed rebellions against the landowners wherever he went. It is suspected that a lot of the songs that were composed during this period were lost, and the songs that have survived have come down to us because they were kept alive in the memories of the people who heard him perform, and the various people whom he taught his songs during the short time that he spent with them. Perhaps therefore Rava's songs traverse several genres, as he picked up snippets of melodies as he travelled. The range of genres he explored included the Bodo Baisagu songs, Asamiya Bihu songs, '*dehbicharor geet*' and many more.

In their creations and their meditations on culture, Agarwala and Rava draw a link between the past, the present and the future. In their theory, they attempt to interweave Marxism with the already existing religious world view, in the process, modifying both to suit the existing local conditions. This is also reflected in the trajectory of their creations and performances. For instance, in his Marxist phase, Rava did not discard many of the songs that he had composed during the thirties, before he joined the IPTA. He used his earlier songs in new contexts, making many



of them a part of the IPTA movement. One such instance is his musical play *Mukti Deul* (1950). The play is a narrative of the history of the workers and peasants of the nation during the mid-twentieth century. The narrative begins with the World Wars, takes the audience through the independence of the country. It gradually leads towards a political, cultural and spiritual awakening of workers and peasants. In this play, Rava uses all his earlier songs and weaves them into a narrative of the awakening of class consciousness.<sup>7</sup> In the play, the songs appear almost in chronological order, ending with his more revolutionary songs like “Bol Bol Bol Bol”. I would say this play works at two levels, the political as well as the personal. While Rava puts forward a narrative of a possible revolution, it is also a narrative of his own artistic journey, a stringing together of his artistic influences into a narrative of artistic evolution. Perhaps one can say that political art is incomplete without engaging with the subjective. As stated earlier, his later songs also made cross references to his earlier songs, giving them a new context and a new meaning, such as “Kashate Kalaci Loi” that I had mentioned earlier. This leads to my question, what makes a song revolutionary? Is it the nature of the songs themselves? Or also the contexts within which they are sung?

Hemango Biswas, who took an initiative to form the Assam branch of the IPTA too played a very important role in revolutionising the music of the region. He too composed and sang songs in Asamiya, and also sang songs composed by Asamiya musicians such as Agarwala. One of the songs he sang was “*Hero Sapon Bibhor*” whose lyrics were written by Nizamuddin Ahmed,

*Hero sapon bibhor*  
*Sur salabar samay ahil tor*  
*Puranik natun kari*  
*Ei beli toi labi garhi*  
*Sur salabar samay ahil tor.*  
 (Oh dreamer,  
 It's time to change your tune  
 Take the old and give it a new form,  
 It's time to change your tune).

Biswas' contribution to the revolutionising of music in Assam was not only through the songs he sang, but also through his theorisation on music. He studied the folk music of various parts of the country, including Assam and Bengal. In the essay “*Lokasangiter Kayekti Adhunik Samasya*” “(Some Modern Problems of Folk Music)” written in the late

1960s or early 70s, he speaks up against the appropriation and distortion of *lokasa-git* or folk music by urban artists in Kolkata. He says that *lokasa-git* or folk music does not have a *gharana* or a musical lineage involving formal pedagogy centred around an individual guru. It has a *bahirana*. Biswas coined the word *bahirana* as an antonym of the word *gharana*, which literally means “house” or “family.” The word *bahirana* comes from the word *bahir*, meaning “outside.” According to Biswas, in the *bahirana*, music pedagogy begins with a feeling of oneness with the people. The people of the community are both the listener and the teacher of this music. Folk music or the songs of the *bahirana* are closely linked with the life struggles of the people. Thus, to sing these songs, the singer must learn not just the words and the music, but also about the contexts from which these musical forms emerge. So, the music of the *bahirana* is as rigorous as that of the *gharana*.

Bhupen Hazarika (1926–2011), was one of the people whose formative years were spent under the influence of Rava and Agarwala. He sang many of the songs recorded by Agarwala and Rava in the 1930s. He began composing music in his early teens. One of the first songs that Hazarika composed, “*Agni Jugar Phiringati Mai*” “(I am the Flame of the Fire Age)”, was included in Rava’s aforementioned play, *Mukti Deul*:

*Agni jugar phiringati mai*

*Natun Bharat garhim*

*Sarbaharar sarbashya*

*Punar phirai anim.*

(I am the spark of the age of fire

I’ll create a new Bharat

I will bring back everything

To the hands of the have-nots).

This concern for the “*sarbahara*” (have-not) found more expression in his songs when he came into contact with the IPTA. When the Assam branch of the IPTA was established in 1948, Hazarika was doing his BA and MA in Political Science in Benaras Hindu University, after which he went to Columbia University and acquired his Ph. D. in Mass Communication in 1952. During his stay there, he met Paul Robeson and was greatly influenced by his music. It is a well-known fact that the song “*Bistirna Parare*” “(On the Two Banks of the River)” (1965) or “*Ganga Behti Ho Kyon*” is inspired by Robeson’s “Ol’ Man River”. When Hazarika, came back to Assam in 1953, he became an active member of the IPTA. Bhupen Hazarika was the Secretary of the Reception Committee of

the third All Assam Conference of IPTA held in Guwahati in 1955. This is the period in which he composed songs like “*Dola He Dola*” (1953), which is a song about the plight of palanquin bearers; “*Parashi Puwate Tulunga Nawate*” (“The Other Morning on a Little Boat”) (1954), which tells the story of a fisherman who goes out to sea and drowns. His music is full of experimentation. Not only did he use a wide range of genres, but he also used a wide range of musical instruments played by the different ethnic groups of the region.

In this paper, I have discussed in detail the role of the founding members of the Assam branch of the IPTA in shaping the music of Assam. However, there were many more musicians in Assam who were closely involved in the IPTA, and carried forward the legacy of these artists and that of the IPTA in Assam. For instance, Dilip Sarma and Sudakshina Sarma, who had both recorded many songs with Rava in their childhood also joined the IPTA. They have both travelled widely, to places such as Russia, China and Poland, singing *ganasangit* (people’s music). They also taught *ganasangit*, the music of Agarwala, Rava and also Rabindranath Tagore to children. Rudra Barua was famous for his songs which depicted the everyday lives of people. Keshav Mahanta, poet and lyricist, too brought alive the everyday travails of peasants and workers in his lyrics. Khagen Mahanta was a singer and composer who was known for his “rustic voice.” One of the most well-known songs written by Keshav Mahanta, set to music by Rudra Barua and sung by Khagen Mahanta is “*Kalare Patate Kauri Pare*” (“A Crow Sits on a Banana Leaf”), a song about the life struggles of a postman. The IPTA movement in Assam also brought to the surface many folk musicians, such as Moghai Oja. Oja was a folk drummer, who used to enthral the audience with his drum and Bihu tunes, and his self-composed verses, with which he interspersed his drumming.

However, after split in the CPI, the IPTA also split, and gradually, the movement died down as artists no longer had a common meeting ground. However, the songs of the artists involved with the IPTA did not disappear. In fact, many of Rava’s songs, some of which were banned, became legitimate after his death when the Assam movement started in 1979. During this period, the All Assam Students Union took advantage of the popularity of Rava’s songs and used many of them to mobilise people in the region. Now, both Agarwala and Rava’s songs are accepted by the middle class, and have been canonised as Rava Sangeet and Jyoti Sangeet. Often, Jyoti and Rava Sangeet are the songs with which the musical education of a child begins in Assam. Agarwala and Rava’s death anniversaries are celebrated all over Assam, including government

institutions, as Shilpi Divas and Rava Divas respectively. Rava has been upheld as the Kala Guru. On the other hand, the Left-leaning intellectuals are trying their best to retrieve the revolutionary aspect of Agarwala and Rava's works. What is interesting is the contrasting context in which their songs are used. For instance, in 2010, when the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti, led by Akhil Gogoi marched to the capital complex of Dispur Guwahati, they sang some of Rava's songs. This was countered by the Assam Government with posters and advertisements which also used these very songs to justify their own position. Thus, the songs of the IPTA in Assam have not been forgotten, but something more disconcerting has happened. These songs have lost their original context. But then, another way to look at the predicament is that perhaps various opposing groups are struggling to capitalise on the immense popularity of these songs. The very nature of songs is also perhaps a reason. The song is a very fluid form of expression that changes with every rendition. This is both its strength as well as its weakness. Constant experimentation and reworking is required for music to respond to contemporary society. This also calls for further detailed study of how a song affects audiences and what kind of a role it plays in social movements.

### Notes

- 1 Tilottama Misra, *Literature and Society in Assam: A Study of the Assamese Renaissance 1826-1926*, Omsons Publications, Guwahati, 1987, p. 173.
- 2 The Ban Theatre was built in Tezpur in 1907.
- 3 Arup Kumar Dutta, *Jyotiprasad: Prince of Beauty*. Anwesha, Guwahati, 2003.
- 4 Indibar Dewri, "Bishnu Prasad Rava: Artist Revolutionary," *Pensive Pioneers*, Ed. Sivanath Barman, Papyrus Books and Beyond, Guwahati, 2011.
- 5 Agarwala and Rava composed their music by blending their knowledge of Hindustani classical music and Western music with the local music. While Agarwala experimented primarily with Asamiya music, Rava explored the music of the marginalised ethnic communities of the region.
- 6 This speech was reprinted in 1961 and on his birthday on 31 January 1969, a few months before his death. Around 75000 copies of this booklet were sold till the third print, as stated in the blurb of the 1969 edition of the booklet.
- 7 In terms of form, in *Mukti Deul*, Rava blends shadow play with different performance forms of the region. Shadow play was one of the theatrical forms which many artists experimented with in the mid-twentieth century. This was a period of upheaval and crisis for the people of India. The transition from colonisation to independence, the partition of the country and the resulting socio-economic problems begged for a new way of understanding the world, a new vision. Artists felt the need to search for new forms to address this crisis. They created these new forms through a synthesis of performance traditions that already existed in India as well as outside the country.